

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 25 : Number Two : Summer 2004

25th Anniversary

Senior Moments

Should Leaders Show Favoritism?

The Bully – A Need for Intervention

Living with Multiple Sclerosis

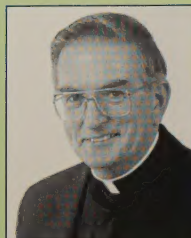
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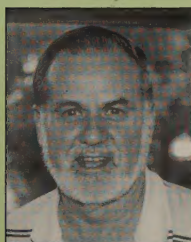
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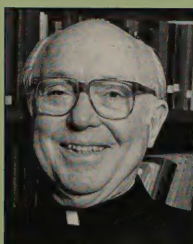
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The quarterly magazine **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** (ISSN 0197-3096) is published by Regis University. Subscription rate: United States and Canada, \$36.00; all other countries, \$40.00. Single copies: United States and Canada, \$10.00 plus shipping; all other countries, \$10.00 plus shipping. Non-profit postage rate paid in Denver, Colorado. Postmaster: Send address changes to **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**, P.O. Box 3000, Dept. HD, Denville, NJ 07834. Copyright 2004 by **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

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Letters to the editor and all other correspondence may be sent to **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**, 1353 Boston Post Road, Suite 11, Madison, CT 06443. Phone: (203) 318-1886 / Fax: (203) 318-1102 / E-mail: jesedcntr@aol.com

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Manuscripts should be submitted to the Executive Editor, Linda Amadeo, either (1) as e-mail attachments in any Windows-based (not Macintosh) word-processing program from 2000 or earlier or (2) by mail (see addresses below). Unaccepted mailed manuscripts will not be returned unless submitted with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is preferred.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

Book reviews (maximum length: 600 words) should be sent to the Book Review Editor, Sister Brenda Hermann, M.S.B.T., A.C.S.W., at bhermann5@comcast.net. Books for review should be sent to Sr. Hermann at 11529 February Circle, #303, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

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Editor's Page

SIGNS OF HOPE

As I write this page, spring has come, by the calendar, but the temperature and the snow that clings in places to lawns and roadsides still speak of winter. Yet even here, in cold Massachusetts, there are signs of new life. I have seen hardy crocus break the hard ground's surface, and a friend saw a robin. Liturgically, we still use purple vestments and omit the Gloria, but we have just celebrated "Laetare Sunday," the Sunday of rejoicing. So Easter is around the corner. We contemplate Jesus, as the dark clouds that led to his crucifixion grow ominous, but we do it with the felt-knowledge that his crucifixion was not the end, but a new beginning.

In our church and our world darkness and gloom seem more the rule than the exception. Here in the Boston Archdiocese, which was so devastated by the sexual abuse crisis, the prospect of closing parishes hangs like a pall over many people. We have passed the first anniversary of the onslaught against Iraq, but we seem no nearer to peace in the Middle East or anywhere else in the world. It does not seem to me that, by the time you read these words, the situation of our church or our world will be any brighter.

As winter yields grudgingly to spring, we find signs of that yielding; and even in the depths of Lent, the liturgy continues to remind us that crucifixion is not the last word. In both these cases, therefore, we find signs that nourish our hope. We may ask: What signs nourish hope as we contemplate the situation in our church and our world?

We need to look around us to find such signs of hope. I find them where I live, in the kindness of the nurses and the nurses' aides at the Health Center for elderly and sick Jesuits; in the support staff who are invariably patient and considerate, even though most of them are new immigrants to the United States and face daunting challenges, and in the faces of my elderly brother-in-laws, most of whom bear the ravages of aging with equanimity and who often smile. I find such signs in the people who come for retreat or spiritual direction, who speak hopefully of their trust in God in often difficult life circumstances; in the widow, for instance,

who lost her husband early to cancer and who, in spite of the pain of his loss, experiences, in faith, his presence encouraging her in her struggles to cope. And I have found signs of hope in stories I've read. I want to recount three such stories that lifted my spirits when I read them.

Just yesterday *The Boston Globe* (March 23, 2004) carried an article entitled "The Richest Man in Town." The title did not bode well; I didn't need to read a story about someone as rich as Croesus and how he spent his money. I would have passed over it, but I recognized the man in the picture. He was a man I know well, Tom White, and the caption noted that he has donated an estimated \$75 million to charitable causes. According to the article, at age 84, Tom has achieved his goal: He has given away almost all his money. Having made certain that his wife and children were taken care of, Tom has taken it upon himself to use his wealth to benefit those less fortunate than he. Over the years he has supported more than 100 causes, but the largest gift has gone to Partners in Health, founded by Paul Farmer, M.D., to help people in Haiti and other desperately poor countries who suffer from AIDS and tuberculosis and other diseases. (Farmer, himself, was the central figure of a much-praised book about Partners in Health, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, published last year by Tracy Kidder.) Farmer is quoted in the article: "He (White) has basically given away his wealth. I've never seen it before, have you? I've read about it in the Bible." Why has he done it? "I'm motivated a lot by what Jesus wants me to do, or what I think he wants me to do. And I think he wants me to help make the world a better place." One of his daughters, Linda Fiske, speaks of him as a great role model and continues, "Some people might feel that as a child, you're entitled [to an inheritance]. But why should you be? I feel if your parents raised you, and put in so much time and energy, they don't owe you....He has been so incredibly generous over the years that none of us feels deprived." This story brought tears to my eyes, tears of joy and hope.

The second story comes from the Christmas issue, 2003, of *The Tablet*, the weekly magazine of opinion

published by Catholic laity in England. Once again, it's a story of someone giving all that he had to help someone else. The writer, Dominic Milroy, O.S.B., was on the subway in London on a gray day a few years ago. As usual, no one paid any attention to anyone else; eye contact was carefully avoided. A family with twin sons about ten years old got on the train, each son carrying a very colorful balloon, one red, one blue, with obvious delight. At the next stop a father with a girl of about seven entered the car. The girl, a Down's Syndrome child, was screaming as she held on to her father. Everyone on the train tried to act as if she weren't there. But the boy with the red balloon noticed. Soon the red balloon could be seen moving toward where the girl continued to scream. When he got next to the girl, he said the first words uttered on the train, "Hello, this is for you. Happy Christmas. Goodbye," and disappeared back into the crowd. The entire mood of the train changed. The girl stopped crying and showed the balloon to her father and to the other passengers around her. Milroy writes that suddenly they all became neighbors; by the time they reached their destination, they were wishing one another happy Christmas and "almost exchanging addresses."

Amazing, isn't it? This ten-year-old boy did what Tom White has done; he gave all that he had to the little girl because she was in need. We don't know what motivated him. He just appeared and gave his balloon away and then disappeared. But he changed the world around him for the better. Another sign that God is with us and that death and alienation will not ultimately win.

The third story involves forgiveness from an unexpected source. Brian McGrory told it in his column in *The Boston Globe* on March 4, 2003. Since 1996, when her son, David (now 46), was hit by a drunken driver, David's mother has had to tend to all his basic needs because he is a semi-comatose quadriplegic. The drunken driver, Daniel, tried to escape but was caught by the police and went to jail where he served a ten-month sentence. Recently, he was again charged with drunken driving. At the hearing, one of David's brothers showed up, and in the parking lot afterward approached Daniel who was with his mother. He told Daniel what had happened to David and how his mother had to care for him around the clock and suggested that Daniel visit his mother and David. Daniel's mother asked if he was serious. Assured that he was, they immediately drove to the house. When Daniel saw David in the bed, he doubled over, as though hit, and began weeping copiously. The mother, who had harbored terrible feelings for Daniel all those years, was so moved that she walked over to

Daniel and hugged him and said, "Daniel, it took a lot of guts to come. It shows you have character. There's David. He has no future. You do. You owe it to David and to your mother and to me and to yourself to fly right." David's mother asked Brian McGrory not to use real names in the story because she didn't want to embarrass Daniel. We do not know whether Daniel did "fly right," but we have read a story of love and forgiveness that are signs of hope in this fallen world.

Each of us has come across such moments that have nourished our hope, have brightened a gloomy day. We, who believe in the resurrection of Jesus, have been given license to be on the lookout for such signs. Some would say that we look with rose-colored glasses and do not see the world as it really is. I would prefer to say that belief in the resurrection of Jesus shows itself precisely in being able to see the God of surprises in action even in unlikely circumstances. For believers "the world is charged with the grandeur of God," as the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins put it. The real world is one where "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1: 5).

On another note, let me say something about our continued celebration of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT's twenty-fifth anniversary. The Spring 2004 issue, dedicated as it was to healing of survivors of sexual abuse, has been in great demand. About 9,400 extra copies were ordered in response to a letter telling church leaders of its contents. We hope that the magazine continues to have a positive influence in our church. To that end, may I ask present subscribers to consider introducing new readers, especially laypeople who have a formative role in the church and may not know of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, to the magazine?

Finally, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT magazine, over the past twenty-five years, has been committed to controlling costs to keep subscription rates as low as possible. Unfortunately, some costs are not under our control, particularly items such as postage, printing and paper costs. To cover these increasing costs, we must increase our annual subscription to \$36.00 in the United States. We sincerely hope that our loyal subscribers will understand the need to keep the magazine financially viable. We appreciate your past loyalty and desire your continued support.

Bill Barry S.J.

William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief

An **EXAMINATION** of Conscience for the Whole People of God

George Wilson, S.J.



It has become commonplace for commentators and analysts to assign the major responsibility for the most recent spate of sexual misconduct to the “clerical culture” of our church. That’s fair enough; there is such a thing, and it is noxious to the health of the Catholic community.

But we cannot allow the analysis, as valid as it is, to stop there. If it merely proceeds to spell out all the moral consequences that follow from such a culture (ambition, deceit, secrecy, etc.), the result will not contribute to the healing we all seek. In fact, it might actually set in order concrete the behavioral patterns that must be changed if healing is ever to occur.

For many people, to place the responsibility at the foot of a clerical culture seems to translate simply into blaming the clerics: the bishops and the priests. It’s a shortsighted view. To take that tack could mean adopting the non-productive policy named so aptly by Eric Berne in his best-seller from the 1960’s, *Games People Play*. He led the game “Get the Leader.” His presentation unmasked our human propensity for absolving ourselves of the burden of complicity in bad outcomes by putting all the responsibility on persons in leadership positions. Playing “Get the Leader” — in this instance, blaming the bishops — is an easy out, a form of cheap grace.

The scripts for a changed culture, one that will not be “clerical,” will be terribly difficult to write, and more difficult to learn. Enacting them will take the concerted action of many players in a variety of roles.

A SYSTEMIC REALITY

For human-systems practitioners, by contrast, it is a given that a “culture” is not some sort of abstraction; it is a single multi-role drama, a power-filled reality that conditions the ways people will tend to behave. A culture can only survive if it is nurtured by zillions of tiny behavioral interactions among all or almost all of those implicated in the culture. If we may continue the metaphor of games, that means cultures are generated by all the players.

That word “all” includes not only the clerics who manifestly enjoy the benefits produced by the whole network of beliefs and behaviors that create and maintain the culture. It also embraces all those among the non-clerics who covertly derive rewards from playing their roles in the same single drama. Paradoxically, it includes even those laity who at a certain level are actually being harmed by the system. Whether that harm takes the form of economic injustice, or unwarranted exclusion from empowerment, or loss of their basic human potential for adulthood, they sustain the prevailing pattern by accepting the script the culture assigns to them. The unacknowledged benefit they derive from acquiescing in a diminished role outweighs the pain they are aware of; otherwise, they would take action to change the balance of roles that enacts the present drama.

A clerical culture is the product of everyone affected by — or implicated in — its continuance. Cultures, precisely because much of their causation is mainly unacknowledged, cling to existence tenaciously. The scripts by which the single drama is enacted have been “recited” so long they become second-nature to the participants. The whole story may appear on the sur-

face to be a series of monologues voiced only by the lead players (the bishops and the priests). But it is actually a complex of set speeches, sotto voce asides, soliloquies and incoherent crowd sounds, all occurring simultaneously on multiple stages — in the chancery, yes, but also in the parish, and in the homes of parishioners. And the story line is affected even by the interior debates and dialogues rumbling within the psyche of any number of individual players: “unheard” by the other players but creating the outcome of the drama all the same, precisely because the unheard conflicts reach the surface in other ways. The behaviors that emerge out of internal dialogues can overpower the lines people proclaim orally.

REQUIREMENTS FOR CHANGE

The scripts for a changed culture, one that will not be “clerical,” will be terribly difficult to write, and more difficult to learn. Enacting them will take the concerted action of many players in a variety of roles. People — everyone — will have to stop playing old roles, and that can prove to be far more difficult than learning new ones. The inertial energy of long-established roles packs great power. Each attempt at a new gesture or line will cause awkwardness for the individual trying it on, as well as uneasiness in those who occupy the same platform and are still reading from the former script. It may even turn out that the present leaders, the clerics, are the least consequential players of all, for they will soon exit stage-right. More significant will be the youth, who, in subtle ways, are breathing in from all of us adults the previously established story line. If they are to participate in creating a new one, they will need us to model a new script and new roles. Hence a painful question: As we ask them to play new roles, are we prepared to acknowledge the ways each of us has been complicit in the destructive old ones?

AN EXAMINATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

To be very direct and personal: We have all created and maintained the clerical culture that clouds our church’s proclamation of the Gospel. We have all played superior-inferior. And we will each have to work diligently to unearth in ourselves the sinful dynamics at work in its continuance.

We have all contributed to the same drama, but we

ve not all played the same roles. We have each played
ite particular roles in the one story. Our self-examina-
n, then, though it contributes its share to the commu-
l conversion that will be required of our faith commu-
y, must be tailored to our own part in the story and
r place on the stage.

The ordinary pew-person: Priests and bishops become
ocratic and self-serving because the non-clerics in the
th community allow it. A clerical mind-set develops in
ests and bishops because laypeople do not challenge
em to something different, and the laity behave in such
omissive ways because they do not want to pay the
ce of Christian adulthood. Putting clerics on pedestals
vertly serves the interest of the run-of-the-mill "con-
mer Catholic" by allowing him or her to evade the
mands of one's baptism. "Father's got a direct line to
od" is a way of devaluing one's own religious calling,
tting oneself down and avoiding a responsible adult
th-life.

This should not be construed as an attack on the
spect that is appropriately due to each community's
aders, whether they be priest, lay minister, bishop or
pe. Respect is one thing, and a necessary thing for
e health of any community. Creating an unreal
coon that shields the ordained from the give-and-
ge that should characterize equals under God is quite
other. Some writers have gone so far as to call the
y many Catholics relate to their bishops and priests
positively idolatrous.

We will all have to work diligently to sort through the
inctions between legitimate respect and inappropri-
e enabling of the clerical mind-set and its resulting
itudes and behaviors. The clerical culture will not be
adicated by listing its shortcomings and crying "Tsk!
tsk!" The power of old cultures diminishes only when
ople pay the price of risking the behaviors that gener-
e new ones. Non-clerics will have not only to talk
out but also to act toward the clerics in new ways. It
uld begin with as small a gesture as a layperson call-
g publicly for an open accounting of a parish's
ances. (How many laypersons, for example, are even
are that in some parishes the entire — quite tidy —
ristmas collection has for years been considered the
stor's personal perk, to be used as he wishes with no
nsideration of the good of the community?) Speaking
and challenging inappropriate claims to clergy super-
iority is not disrespect; it is simply claiming one's bap-
mal dignity as a member of the household of the faith.

The clerics' danger: Clericalism is not restricted to the

The power of old cultures diminishes only when
people pay the price of risking the behaviors
that generate new ones.

church, to priests and bishops. All professional people
are subject to its allures. Public recognition is heady
stuff, whether for an academic degree or a business pro-
motion or ordination. Richard Nixon's associate, Bryce
Harlow, observed, "When they play 'Hail to the Chief,'
give a twenty-one gun salute, and everybody stands up
when you come into the room, and nobody ever tells you
to go to hell, you lose touch with reality." Getting the
corner office morphs easily from being an honor to
becoming an expectation. The ecclesiastical version,
lording it over good Christians because one has earned
a seminary degree, can be more subtle because it is
enveloped in incense and mystification.

In Acts 14, when Paul and Barnabas worked a phys-
ical miracle well beyond the gift of most bishops and
priests, the people cried, "Gods have come among us
in the form of men!" The two apostles rejected the
pedestal, saying, "We are only men, human like you."
Those priests and bishops who genuinely desire to be
converted from the sinful clerical culture will have to
work hard to convince the people that they genuinely
see themselves that way. It will mean rejecting all
marks of privilege — which is quite different from
respect — whether those be upscale cars, dining in the
best restaurants serving the best wines or enjoying
vacations their parishioners couldn't begin to afford. It
will mean simply listening with genuine respect to the
views of people they consider misguided instead of pre-
suming they know what's best for their people. Those
who want to avoid having their priestly calling turned
into clergyhood will have to learn vulnerability and the
willingness to be taught by the rest of the church.

Pastoral leadership and care for the church must
always be suited to the signs of the times. This is not

It will mean simply listening with genuine respect to the views of people they consider misguided instead of presuming they know what's best for their people.

the time for promoting a spirituality of the priest-as-icon-of-the-ineffable. Ordination, with its risk of clericalism, is dangerous enough for a priest's spirituality without burdening priest and laity with more incense. It should be possible to steer — with respect — between the Scylla of expecting a priest or bishop to serve as an icon and the Charybdis of treating him as one-of-the-guys. Our baptism demands no less.

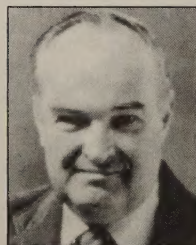
HEALING THROUGH CONFESSION

As for the future, current efforts at training church professionals so as to ensure that our youth are never again subjected to sexual misconduct are praiseworthy and vital. It should go without saying that measures that inculcate and enforce observance of reasonable boundaries for all church personnel constitute a first line of defense against potential new instances of misconduct.

If that is all we do, however, we will have missed a moment of *kairos* (of crisis and opportunity), an opening onto a more profound communal conversion. We have all been wounded by these scandals. The most difficult challenge is to acknowledge — to confess — that a lot of our wounds are self-inflicted. If we are to allow the Lord to teach us new ways of relating we must begin by assuming our share of responsibility for a culture that has begotten terrible evil.

We have not all personally violated children. Only a small percentage of priests and sisters have done those things. We have not wrongly covered up their actions. Only a small percentage of bishops did that. But spiritually we all, cleric and non-cleric alike, stand in a circle around those who did those things, and in the middle of the circle stands another, the Master, who says, "Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone."

Only the whole truth has the power to heal us.



Father George Wilson, S.J., does church organizational consulting out of Cincinnati, Ohio.

THE DESIRE FOR PERFECTION: IS IT GOOD FOR YOU?

Religious life, in Roman Catholicism, used to be called the way of perfection, indicating that those who embraced this way of life aimed at spiritual perfection. Was it a healthy way of life? Should one aim at perfection? Some recent psychological studies question the healthiness of seeking to be perfect, according to an article in *Monitor on Psychology*, November 2003, pp.18-20.

Paul Hewitt, Ph.D., and Gordon Flett, Ph.D., have, over a period of more than twenty years of research, found that striving for perfection is related with depression, anxiety, eating disorders and other psychological problems. This link, they state, is especially strong if perfectionists believe that others will value them only if they are perfect.

Other researchers dispute the strong claims of Hewitt and Flett, maintaining that some people can strive to be perfect without bad effects on their physical and psychological health. However, the research does raise questions on how the goal of being "perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" is presented. For some people, at least, this command can lead to self-absorption and self-torment, the opposite of what Jesus seems to have desired in his followers.

Catherine of Siena's Challenge to Pope Gregory XI: Lessons for Today

Marjorie L. Villegas, M.S.W., Ph.D.

During the recent debate regarding the crisis in the Catholic Church, disagreement with hierarchical authority has been denounced by many as evidence of a number of serious problems, ranging from lack of knowledge of true Catholic doctrine and lack of fidelity to the Catholic tradition, to moral ambiguity and destructiveness to the Catholic community. Yet, throughout its history Christianity has acclaimed many who have disagreed with authorities in an effort to reform the church and challenge its leadership to a more authentic interpretation of the tradition.

This history goes back to the Old Testament. For instance, the prophet Jeremiah accused the priests of his community of leading people astray because they listened to false prophets and valued their power more than the common good. In the New Testament, Jesus denounced interpretations of the tradition being taught by scribes and Pharisees (the religious leaders of his day). In post-biblical times, many of our saints have confronted church authorities in efforts to foster reform. Among these is Catherine of Siena, a fourteenth-century laywoman who challenged hierarchical authority, including two popes, yet has been declared a doctor of the church. Her story offers an important source of reflection regarding disagreement with authorities in our current church crisis.



In letters to Gregory XI she did not hesitate to challenge him regarding his spiritual life, his decisions concerning appointments of church officials and his political policies.

CATHERINE OF SIENA

Catherine, born in 1347, was a single, middle-class woman, a member of a lay group formed under the spiritual guidance of the Dominican Order and, therefore, someone with no official power in the secular or ecclesiastical order. Attracted early on to a life of prayer, Catherine intended to live at home, focus on prayer and become involved in caring for the poor and the sick in her community. However, through her personal encounter with God she felt called to an active involvement in a broad spectrum of spiritual, social and political concerns. She acted as spiritual adviser to many who gathered in her room in the home of her parents; she mediated between individuals of powerful rival families; she attempted to mediate with and influence leaders of city states; she offered advice to popes, cardinals and other church officials.

In the course of these involvements she wrote more than 300 letters, twenty-three of these to Popes Gregory XI and Urban VI.

LETTERS TO GREGORY XI

In letters to Gregory XI she did not hesitate to challenge him regarding his spiritual life, his decisions concerning appointments of church officials and his political policies. The excerpts below show the confidence with which Catherine expressed dissenting views and the boldness and the directness of her language. At the same time, her letters reveal the love and the concern for the church, the pope and his office. This love undergirded and motivated her dissent. In the letter cited below, Catherine called into question the pope's spiritual and moral motivation. She thought he was too fearful and selfish. She boldly dissented from the pope's plan to use military force, suggesting this policy was against God's will.

I long to see you a courageous man, free of slavish fear, learning from the good gentle Jesus, whose vicar you are. . . . Now this is just what I want you to do, father. Let go of yourself wherever selfish love is concerned. Do not love yourself selfishly, nor others selfishly, but love yourself and your neighbors for God's sake. . . . Up then, father; don't sit still any longer! [Further on, Catherine comments regarding the rumored military plans of the papacy for returning from Avignon to Rome.] And, as you value your life, see that you don't come with an army, but with the cross in your hand, as a meek lamb. If you do, you will fulfill God's will. But if you come in any other way you will be violating that will rather than fulfilling it. [To Pope Gregory XI in Avignon, France, ca. May 1376]

In other letters, Catherine emphatically pointed out to Gregory XI his weakness and errors in dealing with church officials. He was not acting forcefully and wisely regarding their sinful and inappropriate behavior; he was not giving priority to the holiness of those appointed to church office. Such weakness of leadership was causing harm to the laity's trust in the church's ability to act with justice and integrity. Further, Catherine disagreed with the pope's policy of pursuing certain civil alliances because she felt these would compromise his freedom to choose leaders and policies that followed God's will rather than temporal priorities. The following excerpts illustrate these points:

Next I beg you to turn your attention to punishing the sins of the Church's pastors and officials when they are acting improperly. See to the appointment of good ones who are living virtuously and justly — which they must do for the honor of God, for their own salvation, and because it is their duty. Besides, lay folk are watching you very closely because they have seen all the trouble that has come of wrongs going unpunished. [To Pope Gregory XI in Rome, late January 1377]

Reform her [the Church] I say, with good pastors and administrators. And I know you can hardly do that with war, since as long as you think you need princes and lords, you will consider yourself obligated to appoint pastors in their way rather than your own. That, however, is the worst of reasoning: to appoint in the Church — no matter what the appar-

ment need — pastors or any others who are not virtuous but self-seeking. . . . And they must not be bloated with pride . . . nor leaves that whirl about in the winds of worldly ostentation and vanity and wealth. [To Pope Gregory XI, January or February 1377]

GOVERNANCE POLICIES VERSUS DOCTRINE

In the letters just cited, Catherine disagreed with Gregory XI regarding policies related to church governance and was critical of his living of Gospel values, but she did not challenge doctrinal issues or the hierarchical structure of the church. Thus, Gregory XI's intent to form certain alliances and to use military power, and his reluctance to punish offending church officials were not policies determined by doctrine. This distinction regarding the content of disagreements with authority is not usually made in our current crisis. For example, challenging the handling of abusive priests, challenging dioceses to greater transparency about the use of finances, or calling for structures and processes that would offer a greater consultative voice to priests and laity are issues of governance that do not question existing doctrine. That bishops should consult with priests and laity is supported by Vatican II and does not imply that the hierarchical structure of authority should be changed. Yet individuals and groups calling for these changes have been judged as suspect in doctrinal matters.

Besides disagreeing with governance policies, Catherine questioned the pope's living of Gospel values. She did not hesitate to conclude that political considerations and issues of power rather than justice drove Gregory XI's handling of church officials. She strongly suggested that Gregory was motivated by self-centeredness and lack of courage. Such questioning did not imply a challenge to doctrinal principles or disrespect for church authority. Indeed, today we interpret her challenge as part of her love for the church and her concern for an exercise of authority based on the exemplary living of Gospel values. I suggest that there is no significant difference between these challenges by Catherine and the questions of those today who wonder if church authorities forgot the Gospel call to justice and protection of the poor and powerless in order to avoid scandal, or the questions of those who wonder if some bishops are protecting their positions of power rather than being wholeheartedly committed to a truthful accounting.

For example, challenging the handling of abusive priests, challenging dioceses to greater transparency about the use of finances, or calling for structures and processes that would offer a greater consultative voice to priests and laity are issues of governance that do not question existing doctrine.

PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO LIVING GOSPEL VALUES

Clearly not all disagreement with hierarchical authority is constructive for the growth and the authentic reform of the church, so the church community is called to discern, to sort out which voices of challenge and critique to follow and trust. While this "sorting out" is a complex process that cannot be fully discussed in this article, Catherine's example offers some guidelines. The spiritual tradition of the church holds that disagreement with church authorities is most likely to be authentic when those who disagree are rooted in a life of relationship with God and a pattern of life that seeks God's will.

Catherine is a saint precisely because the church community has agreed that her relationship with God and her following of gospel values is exemplary. Her confrontation with authorities was rooted in love for the church and deep desire for its holiness. This love was fostered through her commitment to a relationship with God and growth in practice of Gospel values, and this journey was encouraged and guided by spiritual directors and other religious leaders in her community. That is, her religious experience was shared and tested with others committed to the same ideals.

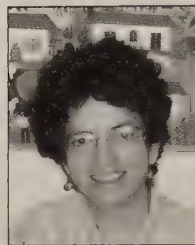
In other words, the quality of a person's commitment to living the Gospel and to the transformational relationship with God that this implies offers important information regarding authenticity of discipleship. The

greater the authenticity of discipleship, the more likely critique of authority will be in tune with the ideals of Christianity. We cannot conclude, as some critics of dissent suggest, that uncritical agreement with authority is the primary criterion for authentic Christian discipleship. Accordingly, despite the difficulties involved in evaluating the spiritual journey of others, the issues of commitment to the living of Gospel values and a relationship with God must be raised if we are to recognize those among us called by the Spirit to renew and revitalize the church.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, what are the lessons to be learned for today from Catherine's story? First, it is possible to be critical of hierarchical authority and yet love the church and the best of its tradition. Therefore, one cannot conclude that because persons disagree with authority they are unfaithful to the church; disagreement with governance policies, concern for reform congruent with official teaching in the church and

questions regarding the practice of Gospel values by authorities do not imply dissent regarding essential doctrine. Retrieval of the prophetic tradition of the church, including examples such as Catherine's, might also serve to bridge the polarization between "conservatives" and "liberals" regarding the crisis in the church. Throughout the history of the Christian tradition, authentic activism aimed at church reform and wholehearted personal commitment to a relationship with God and the living of Gospel values are closely linked.



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REACTIONS TO LOSS AND TRAUMA VARY MORE THAN EXPECTED

The destruction of the World Trade Center and more recently the crisis of clergy sexual abuse have brought to the fore many books and articles on how we react to loss and severe trauma. The prevailing wisdom is that there is a typical pattern of how ordinary people cope with grief and severe trauma. Indeed, so prevailing is this wisdom that those who do not show signs of the pattern are considered either extremely healthy individuals or deniers.

Psychologist George A. Bonanno, Ph.D., of Teachers College, Columbia University, begs to differ. In an article in the January 2004 issue of *American Psychologist* he reports on several reviews of research and a series of studies he and his colleagues have conducted on reactions to loss and trauma. In the prevailing wisdom, resilience in the face of such traumas is a rare trait. Bonanno belies that assumption. In one study he and his colleagues found that many bereaved people exhibit little or no grief, but are not cold and unfeeling and lacking in attachment to those they have lost. Instead, he argues, almost half of the bereaved people in the study showed genuine resilience in the face of their loss, yet prior to the loss had not been rated as cold and unfeeling. Nor did they show delayed reactions to the loss. A review of available research also demonstrates that resilience in the face of violent and life-threatening events is also quite common. He argues that resilience is far more common than many believe.

Bonanno believes that resilience in people comes from different sources. Some have a personality trait called hardiness that helps them to weather loss and trauma. For others, strange to say, self-enhancing biases, i.e., tendencies to rate oneself better than one is, help. For still others, even repression seems to help. Finally, positive emotions and laughter assist resilience in the face of loss and trauma.

The point is that reactions to loss and trauma vary among individuals, and we need to take this into account not only in self-evaluations but also in our pastoral care.

Source: George A. Bonanno, "Loss, Trauma, and Human Resilience: Have We Underestimated the Human Capacity to Thrive After Extreme Aversive Events?," *American Psychologist*, Vol. 59, No. 1, 20-28.

What Really Matters: *a Letter from Carol*

Anonymous



“Carol” (not her real name) was born in 1938. In 1956, at the age of eighteen, she was diagnosed as severely bi-polar and paranoid-schizophrenic, for which she was institutionalized. She spent the rest of her life in hospitals and group homes, until she died at the age of sixty-three in 2001. In 1968, when she was thirty, “Carol” wrote a revealing letter about her psychology and her spirituality to her cousin “Tom” (not his real name), a Jesuit scholastic at the time. Her letter, which referred several times to her correspondence with Thomas Merton, the American writer and Trappist monk, and her esteem for him, was written less than a year before Merton’s death. Following is the text of that letter.

January 26, 1968

Dear Tom,

I don’t know what is prompting me to write you this letter; in fact, I don’t know whether it is a good thing or not — worst of all I cannot practice what I say. Yet I must tell somebody — I just must, and I am going to tell you.

It is the love of Christ that counts. Without this, nothing much matters, except to keep your eye on the truth of life and the reality of things. But even that doesn't matter really, either, without the love. That love is not of an "age" we live in; nor is it like the many different loves upon which we sustain ourselves.

My mental illness is coming to an end; at least I hope it is. Anyway, the suffering is over. And the "light" within me is — gone. I do not know how it can be brought back — this is a biochemical thing supposedly. Yet, the inner struggle is no less real. And I was destroyed rather than saved. And I could not be reasoned with, although I'm supposed to have a high I.Q. So I could not learn or change.

But during the twelve years of inner struggle and my own defects of not learning or listening, I desperately worked and searched for that which was truly real and truly "true." And no one could convince me otherwise. I only found Thomas Merton — and maybe two psychiatrists — both of whom weren't caught up in the muddle of the world and were grounded in truth and reality.

And when it came to the end, they were the only ones who truly "came through." I wrote to Thomas Merton and sent him a picture I had painted. I had put my soul into it. He again answered my letter, even though I had not signed my name, and he told me he was moved deeply and that I was not alone and that he was with me. Then the psychiatrist worked on my case and stated all the truth, but said the prognosis was poor. (I won the battle, but part of me died.) The priest at the hospital came to the ward for my confession — but nothing

from him but old-fashioned disapproval. (I didn't expect anything from him.)

So what I am saying is this. Even though I found the "gems," no one gave me love. I simply sat in the chair, exhausted, tormented, guilt-ridden and desperately thought, "Oh, someone, be Christ, give me the love Christ gave." And I wasn't saved.

I suppose that is the hardest thing of all, the simplicity of which is nearly impossible — but when it came to the end, that was the only answer.

Yet my judgments were correct. I do admire psychiatrists because they really know stark naked reality, but that's all. They get lost in their theories. As far as the religious go — they left me cold, except for the monk Thomas Merton, who confirms my beliefs about the religious in his writings, saying most of them are asleep. He gave me himself. But he gave more than anybody else, and when he dies, I will feel a great loss.

It is the love of Christ that counts. Without this, nothing much matters, except to keep your eye on the truth of life and the reality of things. But even that doesn't matter really, either, without the love. That love is not of an "age" we live in; nor is it like the many different loves upon which we sustain ourselves.

If I ever knew the value of a saint, a real true saint, I knew it then. If I ever longed to see another person's ways give glory to God and not to himself, or to tradition, or to society — that I may ask, "Give me your coat," I longed for it then.

When everything breaks down, and nothing is left and you are suffering — and you are truly poor — every inch of you wishes then that someone would have become like Christ — not so much in phony imitation, but in actuality.

I don't mean to be dramatic, and sadly to say, I will join the world and be like them and blindly hope not to go to hell.

But I just wanted to say, Tom, that truly being Christ says more than all the brilliance and knowledge, and does more to convert sinners, to relieve suffering, and to help the poor than anything else in the whole world.

So I'll say goodbye for now.

Sincerely,

Carol

THE BULLY — A Need for Intervention

teresa Uribe-McGilvray, M.A.



Bullying has existed as long as human civilization. We have all experienced it or witnessed it in one form or another in our lives. Recently, however, our society has become more aware of it and its harmful consequences.

The killings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, in 1999 focused new attention in the United States on the age-old problem of bullying. The two young men responsible for the Columbine shooting spree, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, were apparently taunted and tormented within their school on a regular basis, which has led some observers to attribute their subsequent violent acts at least in part to the cruelty they suffered.

Most teens who commit suicide or homicide are victims of some form of constant bullying. Although “typical” bullying doesn’t usually lead to carnage, it does, as experts increasingly recognize, have long-term effects on the victim, the bully and the bystander.

A major cause of stress at school for children is the fear of being taunted or bullied. Children who are bullied are two to three times more likely to suffer from headaches and other illnesses (ABC News, September 22, 1996). The American Medical Association adopted a report by the Council on Scientific Affairs, which concluded, “Without intervention, bullying can lead to serious academic, social, emotional and legal problems.” In addition, this report states: “Studies of successful anti-bullying programs are scarce in the U.S....adopting a comprehensive approach in schools can change student behaviors and attitudes and increase adults’ willingness to intervene.”

Bullying is a conscious, willful and deliberate hostile activity intended to harm, induce fear through the threat of further aggression and create terror. Whether it is premeditated or seems to come out of the blue, is obvious or subtle, "in your face" or behind your back, easy to identify or cloaked in the guise of apparent friendship or done by one child or done by a group of children, bullying almost always includes the following elements, according to parenting expert Barbara Coloroso (author of *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander*, Harper Collins 2003):

— *Imbalance of Power*: The bully can be older, bigger, stronger, more verbally adept, higher on the social ladder, or of a different race or color. Bullying is not sibling rivalry, nor is it fighting that involves two equally matched children who have a conflict.

— *Intent to Harm*: The bully means to inflict emotional and/or physical pain, expects the actions to hurt and takes pleasure in witnessing the pain. It is not an accident or a mistake, a slip of the tongue and not physical "teasing."

— *Threat of Further Aggression*: Both the bully and the bullied know that the bullying can and probably will occur again. Bullying is not meant to be a onetime event. When bullying escalates unabated, a fourth element is added:

— *Terror*: Bullying becomes systematic violence used to intimidate and maintain dominance.

TYPES OF BULLYING

Three kinds of bullying have been identified: verbal, physical and relational. Each one alone is enough to be damaging, yet they are very often combined to create a more powerful attack. Studies show verbal abuse is the most common form of bullying, used equally by boys and girls. Verbal bullying accounts for 70% of reported cases. Statistics show that boys tend to use physical bullying more often than girls do, and that girls use relational bullying more often than boys. A television program aired by the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) entitled, "Schoolyard Bullies," described these three types of bullying as follows:

VERBAL BULLIES

We've been taught the age-old adage that "sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt

me," but it's quite difficult for a victim to ignore the verbal bully. Words are used to hurt and humiliate their victims. The verbal bully usually resorts to name-calling, insulting, sexist and racist comments and constant teasing. While this type of attack doesn't result in visible scars, its effects can be devastating. Verbal bullying is the easiest form of attack for a bully. It is quick and painless for the bully, but often administers a lasting sting for the victim.

PHYSICAL BULLIES

This type of bully resorts to hitting, pushing, kicking, spitting, pinching and damaging their victim's property. Although this is usually the image that comes to mind when thinking about bullies, fewer than one-third of bullies actually act in this way.

RELATIONAL BULLIES

The most difficult to detect from the outside, relational bullying is the systematic diminishment of a bullied child's sense of self. This is done through ignoring, isolating, excluding or shunning. Rumor spreading is also considered bullying and has been predominately adopted by girl bullies.

Internet chat rooms and receiving nasty text messages on cell phones are replacing schoolyard name-calling. This is known as "cyberbullying." From web pages devoted to particular victims, to anonymous, hurtful e-mail, to unwanted advances through instant messaging, online harassment is revealing an ugly trend of the new school bully. Carrie Herbet, who specializes in dealing with bullied children in the United Kingdom, believes electronic bullying is even more intrusive than the conventional kind (BBC News April 2002). "Children who are being bullied at school can at least get some kind of sanctuary at home." With this form of harassment, however, the text message can come up while you are watching TV or having a family meal. "It is extremely invasive."

SEXUAL BULLYING

All three forms of bullying — physical, verbal and relational — can be wrapped in sexual overtones. This is because our sexuality is an integral part of who we are. Sexual bullying cuts at the core of our being. Peer-to-peer sexual bullying is one of the most widespread

forms of violence in our schools and workplace today, according to Coloroso. In sexual bullying, just as in sexual harassment in the workplace, there is no invitation — just an attack.

Girls who mature early and boys who mature late are at high risk for being targeted for sexual verbal bullying. Words used to bully boys tend to be derogatory terms defining them as “less than a boy” — that is, a sissy (a “sissy”) — or homophobic terms (“gay” or “queer”). The words used to bully girls tend to objectify their bodies, demean their sexuality, or infantilize them (“fat,” “dog,” “babe”).

WHAT MAKES A BULLY?

No one factor tells the whole story. Bullies don't emerge from the womb as such. Inborn temperament is a factor, but so, too, are environmental influences such as: children's home life, school life, spiritual life, community and culture (including the media) that permit or encourage such behavior. The one thing that is agreed on by most research is that bullies are taught to bully. Studies indicate that bullies often come from homes where physical punishment is used, where the children are taught to strike back physically as a way to handle problems. It is often an environment where parental involvement and warmth are lacking. Children who regularly display bullying behaviors are generally defiant or oppositional toward adults, antisocial and prone to breaking rules.

Learning to control anger and to fight instinctual responses is a part of growing up. Most of us manage the process with little difficulty, but the bully usually possesses personality traits that work as obstacles to his or her maturation. Examples of such traits are:

- Greater than average aggressive behavior patterns
- The desire to dominate peers
- The need to feel in control, to win
- No sense of remorse for hurting another child
- A refusal to accept responsibility for his/her behaviors

Bullying is not about anger. Nor is it about conflict. It is about contempt — a powerful feeling of dislike toward somebody considered to be inferior or undeserving of respect. Coloroso states that contempt appears with three apparent psychological advantages that allow one human to harm another human without

feeling empathy, compassion or shame:

- 1) A Sense of Entitlement — the privilege and right to control, dominate, subjugate and otherwise abuse another human being.
- 2) Intolerance Toward Differences — different equals inferior and thus is not worthy of respect.
- 3) A Liberty to Exclude — to bar, isolate and segregate a person deemed not worthy of respect or care.

Just as bullying can range from mild to moderate to severe, so contempt can range from disregard to hate. The biases at the core of this contempt are often found in our homes, our schools and our society. Any prejudice related to race, gender (including sexual orientation), religion, physical attributes or mental abilities can and will be used by a bully to validate and justify contempt for an individual or a group.

VICTIMS

Victims can be anyone. Sometimes it is an accident of time and place. Some people, through no fault of their own, are more likely to become victims. Typically, victims are persons who are different by virtue of physical or cultural characteristics, envied by the bully for a talent or a gift, anyone perceived as competing with the bully for dominance in a social group or, all too often, a shy or depressed individual (poor posture, soft or high voice, lack of eye contact).

ADULT BULLIES

Studies suggest a strong correlation between bullying during school years and experiencing legal or criminal troubles as adults. In one study, 60% of those characterized as bullies in grades six to nine had at least one criminal conviction by age twenty-four. Chronic bullies seem to maintain their behaviors into adulthood, negatively influencing their ability to develop and sustain positive relationships. Another study spanning thirty-five years by psychologist E. Eron at the University of Michigan found that children who were named by their schoolmates at age eight as bullies of the school were often bullies throughout their lives.

Bullies are usually accepted until their mid-teens. Despite their aggressive behavior and actions they can even enjoy social popularity with their peers. Unless new behaviors are learned and adopted, bullies contin-

ue to bully throughout their lifetime. They bully their mates, their children and possibly their subordinates in their place of business. Bullying becomes a habit that gets them what they want. This is what our society must seek to change. Bullying needs to be taught and viewed as unacceptable. There should be no positive gain to this behavior.

DISPELLING THE MYTH

“Bullies are popular and respected: they are considered the cool kids,” said Jaana Juvonen, UCLA professor of psychology and lead author of “Bullying Among Adolescents: The Strong The Weak and The Troubled,” published in the December 2003 issue of the *Journal of Pediatrics*. “They don’t show signs of depression or social anxiety and they don’t feel lonely.”

Depression, social anxiety and loneliness have been thought to be traits of bullies in the past. “We hope that these findings help us dispel the myth that bullies suffer from low self-esteem,” Juvonen said. “Our data indicates that bullies do not need ego boosters.” Unfortunately, this myth continues to guide many programs conducted in schools. Juvonen believes we should be concerned about the popularity of bullies and how to change the peer culture that encourages this popularity.

INTERVENTION

Long gone is the familiar anecdote of “doing nothing” or changing schools or classes to avoid the problem. It is now recognized that adult intervention is necessary and as crucial as teaching non-bullying skills to all children.

Bullying is a problem that occurs in the social environment as a whole. Adult victims have more options available to them than do child victims. Children cannot escape the schoolyard, the cafeteria or the restrooms. Breaking the cycle of violence requires that we examine how and why a child becomes a bully, or the target of a bully, as well as the role bystanders play in perpetuating the cycle. A tragic combination is the bully who is not stopped early in development; bystanders who either watch, participate, or look away; and adults who discount bullying as teasing or as a necessary part of growing up, not an unacceptable problem. It must be recognized as the predatory aggression that it is.

There are several proactive measures schools can take to end acceptance of any type of bullying behavior. A clear message of zero tolerance for all forms of harassment, put-downs and bullying should be sent. This doesn’t mean that schools should try to eliminate differences among students. Schools should, however, demand that students respect one another and treat every student with the dignity he or she has the right to expect in any school system. Some promising solutions include: encouraging students to talk about being bullied and acting against it; getting a buddy — experts agree that bullies are cowards who won’t feel comfortable picking on more than one person at a time; establishing behavior contracts for bullies and their parents, outlining acceptable and non-acceptable behavior with negative consequences if the contract is broken; adopting a no-blame policy so students are not afraid to report incidences that occur; requiring victims of bullying to take a course in learning how to stop being bullies. Victims need to learn to be positive, to maintain eye contact, to stand their ground, to walk with confidence and to report bullies to counselors, teachers and parents before there is any escalation in the bullying.

There are also two commonly held solutions that do not help. The first is to “do nothing” to ignore the problem. This gives a green light to the bully and seems to exacerbate the situation. The second solution that tends to have a negative effect on the victim is to change schools or classes to avoid the bully. This only empowers the bully and weakens the victim’s self worth. The stronger the victim feels about himself or herself within, the weaker the bully will become on the outside.

We as parents, teachers, educators, clergy and laypeople need to bring bullies into the sunlight. They are used to being protected by being left in the dark. We should not be afraid to alert faculty and administration of any problems so they can be more watchful, aware and discouraging of bullying behavior.

“Victims are reluctant to talk about their plight,” Juvonen said. They suffer in silence and often blame themselves. This is one of the challenges for intervention: “Students must be provided with educational settings in which they feel comfortable talking about their plight. Children also need to be given tools to effectively deal with bullying. One such tool involves engaging students to talk about strategies that might help them stop bullying and tactics that make them feel better after being bullied. Teachers can facilitate the generalization of these skills if they help students mediate

idents between students.”

“The key is to stop it at the elementary-school level and reinforce a ‘no bullying’ policy right through high school. Strong measures and consistency are vital to stopping this abusive behavior,” says an *Education World* 1999 article.

CONCLUSION

Bullying can be a life-and-death issue that we ignore at our children’s expense. It should not be minimized and trivialized by adults, taken lightly, brushed off or have its existence denied. Thousands of children go to school every day filled with fear and trepidation; others sign illness to avoid being taunted or attacked on the school bus, or in the schoolyard, hallways and bathrooms. Unfortunately, according to Coloroso, children who are bullied spend a lot of time thinking up ways to avoid the trauma and have little energy left for learning. As adults working and living in our education system, it is our duty and responsibility to provide a safe school environment for all students.

It is not only the bullied child who suffers the consequences of bullying. As I stated before, many children who bully continue these learned behaviors into adulthood and are at increased risk of bullying their own children, failing at interpersonal relationships, losing jobs and potentially ending up in jail. Bystanders who do nothing to intervene carry the moral burden of witnessing a person or a group cause irreparable damage to another person.

“Children do not magically learn morality, kindness and integrity. These are taught much like math, reading and science,” says Neil Kurshan, author of *Raising Your Child to be a Mensch* (Simon & Schuster, 1987). Children mature into responsible and loving people by copying the adults around them, especially brave parents with a strong faith and good principles who do not look the other way when they see injustice. Our children need to be around adults who are not afraid to step in, speak up or stand against any bullying behavior, whether it is in the family room, the playground, the office or driving down the street. In other words, adults have to “walk the walk” in order for children to learn kindness and morality.

“How can we make acting courageously, and treating others kindly, fairly and justly habitual responses to everyday events? Moral education involves not only learning a virtue, but also knowing what constitutes

virtuous behavior and having the strength to act accordingly. A child must want to be the kind of person who acts courageously... and must know how to do it and must be willing to do it,” says Coloroso.

Our schools, communities and churches play an important role in teaching respect for self and others, but home is where children receive the first lessons of their moral education.

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The Storm on the Lake

James Torrens, S.J.

If Jesus Lies Asleep

If Jesus lies asleep with the waves slapping
and a storm wind up — as calm as can be,
his head on some coiled rope — it's so I can see,
O me of little faith, just who is napping.
It's not God, in whom Jesus snuggles now,
though I'm frantic, sure we will all go down.
"How could you doubt?" he asks with a hurt frown
when forced awake by the faintheart at the prow.
As if my voice had never lifted a psalm
telling in whom I confide, or in pitch dark
my feet hadn't done the trust walk at all
where the spirit says to the pulse, "*Du calme!*"
Or my eyes hadn't ever lit with the spark
of the love that holds wind and sea in thrall.

Several decades ago, when I was studying theology in Belgium, I stayed for three weeks at a convent of sisters above Lake Como in northern Italy. I was recuperating from a bout of asthma due to the Channel weather. One afternoon, when I was out walking, I got this sudden feeling of tension in the air and ran for my cabin just in time to slam the green window shutters shut. A cyclone hit out of the mountains and, in fifteen minutes, uprooted a stand of forty-year-old pines. Out on the lake there was just one boat, with its steersman and a family from France. The boat capsized, and all but the steersman drowned.

That is what I think of when reading Saint Mark's account of the storm on the lake (4:35-41): "A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat." Lakes are all too susceptible to strong winds. So are human affairs. We have all had our exposure to a violent squall, physically or metaphorically.

For the Catholic Church as for the world in general, such a season of turbulence was the late Sixties and early Seventies. We had a Jesuit province gathering back then, a spirituality workshop, with Father John Futrell. At one point, he divided us up into small groups to pick out and discuss the one passage of scripture that struck each of us as apt for our spiritual condition. Three in my group of eight, including myself, picked the storm on the lake.

Some of the world's great artists, such as Rembrandt with "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee," have depicted vividly the wide-eyed terror of the apostles out there in the waves. Small wonder they got panicky; they had forgotten who their companion was. There Jesus lay, his head on a cushion, like a child in his mother's arms, the very picture of trust. Some people, as we know, can sleep through anything. Jesus, however, was living by Psalm 91, the one with which the devil had tried to trip him up:

*You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shelter of the Almighty, . . .
you shall not fear the terror of the night
nor the arrow that flies by day.*

In a genuine contemplation, the scene happens

before our eyes, with us somewhere within it. We can well imagine the disciples shaking the Master awake. According to Saint Matthew, he responds quizzically: "Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?" (8:26). What might I answer to that? Perhaps it is not a sudden crisis, something beyond my poor powers, that makes me fearful. It could be death, the judgment of God, the vastness of the cosmos. I could be anxious about looking bad in public, bearing pain, being found out, facing up to authority, losing my memory or mind.

Jesus asserts himself against the storm — "Quiet! Be still!" — and the tempest calms instantly. The forces of nature are not in charge. Saint Mark concludes with this observation: "They were filled with great awe, and said to one another, 'Who is this that even the wind and the seas obey him?'" They have experienced the divine power and felt small before the Holy One.

One phrase from Saint Mark's account sticks out: "O you of little faith." How could you not have confidence, the Lord wants to know? *Confidentia*, in Latin, means acting *cum fide*, with faith. In their crisis, the disciples, whom we recognize as our own proxies, had not acted with faith, had not acted religiously.

According to Erik Erikson, in his classic *Childhood and Society*, confidence is as basic to being religious as it is to human life. In both cases, it is the beginning step. The infant needs to feel continually that some other person is there for them, full of concern. And each child needs an encourager who can foster the sense of budding capacities. As to religions, what they all have in common, Erikson maintains, is periodic

abandonment of a childlike sort into the hands of a Provider, the one who dispenses physical or spiritual good fortune. Confidence in God's care, even in the face of death, is what he calls the touchstone of the religious spirit. Erikson also notes that, paradoxically, religions often thwart confidence by keeping the adherents infantile. Enforcing dependency is a distorted form of care. He adds that the confidence of individuals needs to coalesce into a commonly held faith, a community of faith.

There is something ingenuous, something childlike, about the expressions of trust that keep showing up in the biblical psalms. It is a salient feature of the psalms. "Like a weaned child on its mother's lap, so is my soul within me," says Psalm 131, one of the briefest. The psalms resound with cries of distress and bristle with the menace of enemies, but they mostly end up in a reassurance:

*Truly the guardian of Israel
never slumbers or sleeps (Ps. 121).*

Jesus in the boat, aware that his beloved "Abba" is at no moment slumbering, could sleep securely. At home he had learned to trust himself to loving care, which he certainly does here. Thanks to these past tenderings of love, Jesus could embody in his life the hopeful attitude put into these words by the philosopher Gabriel Marcel: "I trust in you for us."

How much we undertake in the commitments of our lives. We commit to discipleship and ministry, to a religious vocation, to a partner for life

or to a promise of celibacy. All that, on the face of it, is daunting and even overwhelming. What a blessing, often enough, that the future is veiled from our eyes. There are missions and responsibilities, to say nothing of human or ecclesial tangles that make us, on some mornings, wonder how we can put on our shoes. They call for much more than ordinary confidence. So did the storm on the lake.

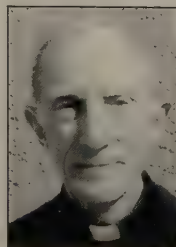
The Acts of the Apostles presents the disciples of Jesus in a much better, transformed state, proclaiming Christ before the unfriendly powers that had done away with him. The Sanhedrin, "observing the boldness of Peter and John and perceiving them to be uneducated, ordinary men, were amazed, and they recognized them as the companions of Jesus" (4:13). A new quality impels these men. The author of Acts, Saint Luke, highlights a Greek noun to describe it: *parrhesia*, meaning "assurance," "boldness." The term is used again for the return of Peter and John to the new believers and the ensuing prayer: "Lord, enable your servants to speak your word with all boldness" (4:29). The answer comes immediately. "The place where they were gathered shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness" (4:31).

Looking backing at our apostolic lives, we find that we have done or endured a number of things that we never dreamed we could. This is not due to us primarily. The Holy Spirit has been at work continually to breed confidence. Even when we have to pick ourselves up after a spill and go on, as Cabiria does in Fellini's finest film,

"The Nights of Cabiria," the gift of this genuine confidence is what drives us. An African-American hymn refrain sums it all up:

*We've come this far by faith,
leaning on the Lord,
trusting in his holy name.
He's never failed us yet.*

The episode of the storm on the lake is an image not just of the individual on churning waters but of the whole church. Just as Noah's ark was taken by the Fathers of the Church as an image of the church preserved by God's salvific patience, so is the boatload of apostles on Lake Genessareth. Today the storm clouds lowering over the church in the United States certainly call us also to confidence in the tight hold of the divine arms. Our Savior desires for us, as much as he did for those first disciples, the faith that keeps on leaning and the undaunted boldness that alone can bring the vessel through.



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Suffering as a Way to God

Marie Beha, O.S.C., Ph.D.



The suffering in our world seems overwhelming at times. It cries out from countries devastated by famine, afflicted by the pestilence of AIDS and torn apart by an unending cycle of violence and war. It confronts us in the immediacy of our own country: families crowding into shelters, and the elderly alone and lacking adequate medical care, as well as in the senseless shootings that erupt in the supermarket parking lot. Suffering afflicts our own flesh in sickness and weighs down our spirits in depression and discouragement. Yes, our world is awash in pain and suffering. How do we choose to respond?

Denial is one of the easiest and least fruitful reactions. We see, we hear, and we turn away as quickly as possible — tune into another channel, or bury the troublesome front page with the glowing promises of the ads or the society page. We put off visiting the friend in the hospital; we forget the dire warnings of our physician about the consequences of not making unwelcome lifestyle changes. Like children we hide from what we don't want to see and grow deaf to any summons that threatens our comfort level.

Discouragement and defeatism are another unfruitful response. It is all beyond us so we do nothing. We withdraw from life, allowing sadness to paralyze us. With our face to the wall, we shut out the light

On the physical level loss of consciousness makes it impossible for me to perceive the pain my body still knows; on the emotional level numbness or distraction may dull heartache without healing the hurt.

and live in a world of gathering darkness. Hopelessness prevails. At the opposite end of the spectrum, we may grow angry, but instead of being energized by our passion, we allow it to fester into bitterness. We complain endlessly about suffering's unfairness, raging against the injustice of it all. We blame everyone but ourselves, castigating "them," including God, for being so heartless. There is no good news, no realistic hope of change.

Suffering is truly a two-edged sword, cutting and dividing, revealing and changing. It can either deform us or transform us, never leaving us the same. Just as it can discourage and defeat us, so also it can make us stronger and more open of mind and heart. And what makes the difference? Our response to suffering?

PAIN VERSUS SUFFERING

"Pain will occur; suffering is a choice." That sentence literally jumped off the page at me. What did it mean? Did I agree with it? What was my own experience? Days later I was still reflecting. I soon realized that I had come to use the two terms interchangeably. But with a little reflection I could begin to separate them. Pain seemed the immediate response to something hurtful. A wide range of experiences came to mind — everything from a sliced finger to major surgery, from the relatively brief encounter with the dentist's drill to the all day, most every day of something more chronic like arthritis. I could also easily recall the times when my heart hurt but the pain came not from clogged arteries but from another's words or actions...or my own.

Regret for a lost opportunity oppresses me every time I think of it. Failure can be more painful than any physical affliction. Major loss weighs me down; I may continue to mourn the death of someone dear to me even though it occurred many years ago.

Pain comes in many sizes and degrees. Each individual experiences it differently depending on a host of variables. Even the same individual may know today's pain differently from yesterday's. Fortunately, pain has a self-limiting principle. On the physical level loss of consciousness makes it impossible for me to perceive the pain my body still knows; on the emotional level numbness or distraction may dull heartache without healing the hurt.

All pain is psychosomatic. It may begin in my body, but it eventually reaches into the very fabric of my being, or it can begin in the mind or the spirit yet end up as a stomach cramp or a bad headache. Doctors say that a patient's attitude makes a major difference in something as organic as the progression of a tumor or healing after surgery. And we all know how even a bad cold can darken one's disposition and how a bad day at work can result in an upset stomach.

If it is of any consequence, pain ends up affecting the whole of me and quite possibly reaching beyond me into the world immediately around me. It is a social reality as well as a personal one. My pain of body or spirit affects others, rippling out in ever widening circles. Who of us has not experienced something of this as we leave a hospital sick room or a funeral parlor? The pain of others saddens us; we take it in. We may also pass it along. If I am having a bad day, I may make it more difficult for you to have a good one. Depression depresses. An individual's hopelessness can infect a whole group.

Despite our instinctive reaction to it, pain is basically good; it is a healthy response that tells us something is wrong. If we were unable to feel pain, we would have to be on constant alert to dangers we could not perceive. Hot water would scald us; sores would become infected wounds. Grief, our own or that of others, would leave us untouched. Numbed to the world around us and inside us, we would be only half-alive.

Suffering is our response to pain; it is the attitude we choose when we experience it. We can, for example, simply ignore the pain we are feeling, or we can let it

become the focus of our concentrated attention. Our attitude can run the gamut from stoic endurance to attempts at denial, from restless rebellion to supine surrender. We may try various strategies, hoping to find one that will work for us, meaning one that will enable us to cope with the pain either by eliminating it or greatly reducing it. In other words, we choose not to suffer. Unfortunately, such coping mechanisms are limited in their usefulness. They barely touch the major pains of life primarily because they are aimed at something we cannot control. We continue to suffer even if only in anticipation of the next painful situation that will come our way.

Still, there is a basic rightness about our more or less successful strategies to avoid suffering. Suffering was not part of God's original creation. We were not meant to suffer. Now we do because we are not back in the garden; we live in a different world, one that sin has helped to create. With sin came suffering. But in the wondrous mystery of God's love, suffering also offers redemptive possibilities through the power of the cross. Once again, the choice is ours.

REDEMTIVE SUFFERING

Pain gets our attention, warning in strong language that something is wrong. Put more positively, pain calls for change. So I remove my hand from the too-hot surface; I call the doctor or EMS. I defend myself from a physical or a verbal attack. In doing so, I experience salvation. But there is much more. Beyond immediate physical reaction there is my long-term response to pain's persistent presence. What will suffering mean for me? That was the question that Job and his friends wrestled with; it is still ours in a world filled with pain. As we have already mentioned, our choices range from denial to exaggeration, from refusal to take any positive action to allowing pain to become our world view. Is there a better way, one that forms us into strong, compassionate persons? I would like to suggest a mantra that reveals for me something of pain's redemptive possibility: "Receive, accept, return."

"Receive" begins with an acknowledgment that we are in pain. We give up denial in favor of the truth. This can be as simple as admitting that we are coming down with a bad cold and need to take something for it. It

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can be as profound as confessing, "I am not happy here," and examining the consequences. Acknowledging pain allows us to admit that we were wrong and apologize; it frees us to retrace our steps and begin again. It is strange how we resist such admissions of weakness. We may get no further than a grudging statement, "I should do something about it," but do nothing to change the situation. Why? Perhaps we have some futile hope that the pain we do not acknowledge will simply go away. It rarely does. On a deeper level we may be resisting the redemptive changes we are being invited to make.

Acknowledging our pain not only refrains from denial but also refuses exaggeration; it keeps pain in perspective. Mine is neither the only pain nor the worst pain. Despite its immediacy and insistence, it is not even the whole of my reality. I am left with the freedom to choose, if not whether I will suffer, at least how I will suffer.

By resisting the twin temptations of either denial or over-responsibility, I allow truth to set me free. That is the first phase in redemptive suffering. But it's just a beginning. We must go on to accept what we have first received, to reach out to what is being offered to us. Receptivity begins in a faith act that professes that whatever comes into our life holds a promise of something good. We believe this even in the face of suffering just because we are so certain about the intentions of the Giver. Everything is gift, and we open hands and heart to receive it. This is faith's basic response, costly but well worth the price. Fruitful suffering stands in trust, knowing we are always being cared for.

It is this attitude of receptivity that pain tests. We find it easy to stretch out eager arms toward the obvious

I recall that as a child I received presents that I had to grow into appreciating. Very often they turned out to be the best just because they hid so much more than my childish desire could have imagined.

gifts of a lovely day, good health, good news, the joy of coming holidays or the visits of cherished friends. When sickness afflicts us, when our carefully conceived plans are frustrated, when we fail and are blamed, then receptivity is tried. Our temptation is to concentrate so much on what we are feeling that our focus narrows and our fists tighten in resistance. We suffer and ask “Why?”, demanding an answer. We blame others and keep circling around our hurt. Such hardness of heart keeps us locked into the pain, precluding the openness that might allow us to hear an answer.

Redemptive suffering moves in quite a different direction. Having acknowledged pain with some appropriate expression of our naturally felt resistance, we remain at peace because we know that a good Giver is always giving good gifts. We wait in patience for time to reveal the potential in this strangely wrapped present. We trust, knowing that we are in for surprises as time reveals the potential hidden in what we have received. I recall that as a child I received presents that I had to grow into appreciating. Very often they turned out to be the best just because they hid so much more than my childish desire could have imagined. I continued to use my chemistry set long after I would have discarded some trinket on which I had set my heart.

I must be willing to look beyond the immediate source of my pain. “Downsizing cost me my badly needed job.” “Inferior schools provided me with a poor education.” “Working with asbestos left me with vulnerable lungs.” If this presumption of mine is true, then acknowledging it and opening myself to receive its grace concentrates energy for creative response. This is

the first gift that redemptive suffering offers me. I begin writing resumes, get up my courage and find a way to obtain additional education, or I join or form a support group. Suffering that has been accepted searches out potential. To discover just what this is may take time, a long time, but my attitude already forms something inside of me, and I am freer because of it. Redemption proceeds.

Sometimes the most positive action that suffering can undertake is that of “patient endurance.” A long road of chemotherapy stretches ahead, and we must go forward with only meager hope of a cure to sustain us. We keep on believing and loving another person whose self-destructive habits are costing us dearly. Ultimately, many of us will hear the doctor say, “There is nothing more that I can do for you.” It is at times like these that we are most challenged to suffer redemptively.

It is said of Jesus, “He learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb. 5, 8). So will we. We accept suffering because we believe that it is in this set of circumstances that we will meet God and discover God’s will. Not that God wills us to suffer; nothing could be further from the truth. We believe that the Giver of this unasked for gift is all good, creates only good things, desires only our good. Faith tells us this is true even in the presence of persistent pain. Redemptive suffering believes that God remains with us, perhaps closer than ever before, offering us what we need not only to endure but also to grow.

Our own salvation history can offer us some assurance of suffering’s promise of good. Many of us can recall past suffering that we are now able to count as the greatest of goods. We lost our job, and it seemed a tragedy at the time, but that set of circumstances forced us into a new and more worthwhile life direction. Sickness spoiled our plans but revealed the steadfast love of family and friends. The latter is a gift we would not want to have missed. Loneliness taught us the value of solitude, and we are now stronger because of it. Suffering always forms us; its patient endurance can shape us into trusting, grateful people. For this to happen our faith must be so strong that nothing can really shake it. This is what accepting God’s will means. God loves us enough to transmute the dross of pain and suffering into the gold of glory. This is the belief that sustained Jesus in his passion. “Am I not to drink

the cup that the Father has given me?" (Jn 18, 11). His pain accepted and received, in fruitful suffering. "Not my will but yours be done" (Lk 22, 42). This is the attitude of complete obedience that sustained a life of increasing rejection, making possible the passion's endurance. At the end, redemptive suffering's last word was one of trusting surrender and grateful love, "Father, into your hands" (Lk 23, 46). May our lives say the same.

They will if, in addition to "receive" and "accept" we add "return." And what do we return? Gratitude; we say "thank you" for all that comes into our life and do so even as we suffer. What we feel is the pain, written large in body, mind and heart. Such pain, as we have already mentioned, gets our attention; it is meant to do so. But we are still left with some freedom of choice. How will we respond? That is always suffering's question. Even as we begin to do what is necessary to meet pain's challenge, we also turn our face toward the ultimate source of all that comes into our lives. We stand firm in trust-filled peace; we say thanks.

In this way receptivity and acceptance find focus beyond ourselves. We escape the prison pain can become, moving from self-absorption to self-gift. In giving thanks, we make real our total dependence on God and at the same time affirm that we have an irreplaceable role to play in the redemptive process. Everything comes from God. Still, we, and we alone, can return everything back to God. This is our awesome responsibility, and it is exercised in an especially profound way in suffering's crucible. Now we add to

"your will be done" the preferential acknowledgment, "not my will." Grace's gift makes possible our "yes."

Not that we choose suffering; to do so would be "sick." We choose God. We believe that we are being invited to meet God in these particular circumstances; this is the present moment of grace forming us into the likeness of the crucified Jesus. Such an attitude presumes, of course, that our receiving and accepting are more than just pious sentiments; they are the desires of our heart. This is what our return "thank you" says. Even in the darkness of experienced pain we are grateful. This dynamic of suffering's chosen response to pain takes us away from the cramp of over-concentration on the pain itself; it provides an opening into suffering's meaning. We don't know this fully, but we do profess in faith that there is meaning. We wait for it in hope because we love the One who gives only good gifts.

Our mantra of "Receive, accept, return" is forming us into faithful, hope-filled lovers.



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CHILDREN NEED TO TALK ABOUT THEIR ORDINARY FEARS

In a report of a study by the Sesame Workshop, a nonprofit educational organization, Deborah Smith raises some interesting points about children and their fears. It seems that in times of crisis adults do a good job of helping children talk about their fears. For example, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, children received a great deal of attention and are still experiencing positive effects from it. But when life returns to normal, adults do not ask children about their fears, and, as a result, they seem to have more fear of ordinary daily events, such as bullying and television violence, than they do of terrorist attacks.

Children tell researchers that they want adults to discuss such fears with them much as they did after 9/11. Sesame Workshop Vice President of Research Strategy Susan Royer says: "Most importantly, when things are 'normal,' children seem to feel most alone and helpless in their fear, and unlike Code Orange times, parents can be clueless about kids' anxiety, and kids know that." Three teen-agers who attended the workshop said that adults should talk with children about frightening events even if the children say they are not worried about them. Often, they say, children don't want to burden their parents. *Monitor on Psychology* (May, 2003, pp. 22-23)

Living with Multiple Sclerosis

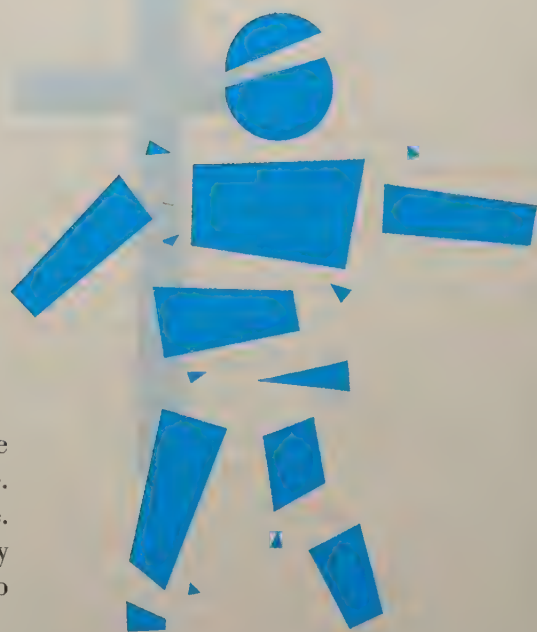
Reverend Joseph A. Weigman

I was not born brave. There are many definitions of bravery. One is: showing courage, not being afraid in the face of a challenge. Sorry, I am not brave in that type of way. I was not born brave. I was, however, born stubborn. Stubbornness means that despite my fears and anxieties, I am determined and will usually find a way to do what I need to do.

Stubbornness is a part of who I am, and it, not bravery so much, has often been what gets me out of bed in the morning to face a new day of the challenges that come with living with primary-progressive multiple sclerosis. As much as I have depended upon my stubbornness, I know that it lies in tension with another aspect of my life that I still have something to learn about: acceptance. Fighting for what I want is good, but there comes a time when I must stop fighting to consider what God wants.

A spirituality of living with multiple sclerosis (MS), it seems to me, has to be grounded in this consideration of God's role. My faith tells me that God is indeed a part of my living with this disease and, therefore, I have hope.

My hope has been enhanced by my exposure to Ignatian spirituality and to the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius. In this article, I will journey through the Four Weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises*, reflecting upon what I believe are some implications for me. I will then point to how I believe my ministry of spiritual direction has



been affected. I hope that my insights and reflections are relevant to others living with MS, to other spiritual directors, and to all those wishing to make their own lives more spiritual.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

MS appears to be an autoimmune disease that affects the central nervous system. The main components of the central nervous system are the brain and the spinal column, which control the nerve impulses that are sent to nerve systems throughout the body. Each nerve is covered by a fatty substance called myelin. Myelin insulates the nerve and aids the transmission of nerve impulses, the “messages,” between the brain and the body.

For an unknown reason, healthy myelin is mistakenly destroyed in the body of someone with MS. The process is called demyelination. When myelin is destroyed, the electrical signals sent by the brain to various parts of the body are disrupted. The symptoms produced are determined by where in the nervous system the demyelination occurs and how extensive it is. There are four different types of MS, which differ from one another according to the rate and the severity of the progression of the disease, both of which are difficult to predict. I have the primary-progressive form of the disease, the most rare and the most severe form. While that certainly can be considered bad news, the good news is that I do not live with as much unpredictability as those who have milder forms of the disease.

MS affects about 350,000 Americans, most of whom are diagnosed between the ages of twenty and forty. Because MS generally emerges in young adulthood, when careers and families are being launched, the effects of MS are clearly economic and emotional, as well as physical.

MS is only rarely fatal. Most people who are diagnosed go on to lead fairly normal lives, most likely making some necessary lifestyle adjustments but probably not having to use a wheelchair.

THE FIRST WEEK OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Ignatius of Loyola divided his *Spiritual Exercises* into four periods, which he named “Weeks.” These weeks do not correspond to the calendar, but to the stage of development of the retreatant. The purpose of the First Week is to help the one making the *Exercises* (the exercitant) come to an appreciation of the disorder of

While that certainly can be considered bad news, the good news is that I do not live with as much unpredictability as those who have milder forms of the disease.

sin “with its tendency to enslave us” and of “the joyful mystery of saving forgiveness.” An appreciation of sin means appreciating both communal sin and personal sin. My reflections will focus on my personal sin, as illuminated by the Principle and Foundation:

People are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save their soul....For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things...so that, on our part, we want not health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, long rather than short life, and so in all the rest; desiring and choosing only what is most conducive to the end for which we were created (Spiritual Exercises, # 23).

As I began this article, I stated that I have much to learn about acceptance — moving beyond what I want to a consideration of what God wants. I am too egocentric: I too often want health, not the sickness I have been given. (Saint Ignatius got it right.) After all, health is good, sickness is bad, right?

At the core of my sinfulness, I think, is a lack of trust. I find it difficult at times to trust that God is with me in my sickness and loss. I sometimes ache for the way, it seems to me, that my life should be; the way I thought my life was going to be; the way my life was when I answered God’s call to become a priest.

There are also times, however, of greater clarity for me; for example, during my first year of priesthood (before I used a wheelchair), I was asked to be the spiritual director for a Teens Encounter Christ (TEC) weekend. As I was being introduced to give my talk on the Paschal Mystery, I noticed the graphic in the TEC

My priestly ministry has not turned out to be what I thought it would be, but I am growing (however slowly) in my understanding that it is turning out to be what God wants it to be.

booklet on the page that contained an outline for my talk. It was a man handing a bouquet of flowers to a woman seated in a wheelchair. At that moment, I realized that that graphic illustrated the Paschal Mystery for me: What had to die was my image of myself as a priest “giving away flowers,” giving away ministry, as it were. And what had to be born was an image of myself as a priest also receiving flowers/ministry from others, especially if I someday found myself in a wheelchair.

I photocopied that graphic, and I keep it in a place where I can look at it every day to remind myself that life is about giving and receiving. My priestly ministry has not turned out to be what I thought it would be, but I am growing (however slowly) in my understanding that it is turning out to be what God wants it to be.

SECOND WEEK OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

In the Second, Third and Fourth Weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the exercitant is ready to look seriously at the implications of making a commitment to follow Jesus. In the Second Week, the focus is on the mystery of the Incarnation — the life of Jesus, from his birth to the end of his public ministry. The Meditation on Two Standards provides a way for me to focus on the call Jesus made in his ministry and helps me to reflect spiritually on living with multiple sclerosis. The focus on Jesus is preceded by a focus on Lucifer:

Consider...how [Lucifer] tells [innumerable demons] to cast out nets and chains; that they have first to tempt with a longing for riches...that people may more easily come to vain honor of the world; and then to vast pride...(Spiritual Exercises # 142).

I struggle with pride. While I have not really imagined myself being entangled in “demonic nets,” I know that the desire for riches/honor/pride is not the mark

of a disciple of Jesus Christ. My struggle has been a life-long one, and it continues now that I am living with multiple sclerosis. For example, it manifests itself when I find myself wanting to “blend in” so that I will be seen to be as “normal” as possible. I am almost embarrassed to be seen as “different.”

Given that MS has limited my ability to accomplish tasks, another manifestation of my pride is believing with my head that it is sufficient simply to be present (to God and to others), but not always believing it with my heart. Lucifer, it seems, has indeed entangled me in his net. Saint Ignatius challenges me to focus, instead on Jesus:

Consider how the Lord of all the world chooses so many persons...and sends them through all the world spreading his sacred doctrine. Consider the discourse which Christ our Lord makes to all his servants and friends whom he sends on this expedition, recommending them to...[preach]...humility against pride...(Spiritual Exercises, # 145, 146).

In this meditation of the Fourth Day, Jesus says that humility is what is needed.

What is humility? Some understand it as “timidity” others understand it as “earthiness.” The essence of this classic virtue, however, is honesty. Humility dictates that we neither exaggerate nor minimize, but that we simply accept our humanness as it is.

I am confronted with a choice. I can listen to Lucifer who tells me that I am not quite good enough in my humanness, that I need more; or, I can listen to Jesus who tells me that I am good enough. Jesus calls me to minister to the world in my imperfect humanness, doing what I can with what I have. The implications for me of following Jesus are: I must recognize that there are a variety of ways to “spread his sacred doctrine” (*Spiritual Exercises*), and I must recognize that in preaching my words will not be nearly as powerful as the way I live.

THIRD WEEK OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

The contemplations of the Third Week continue to offer challenges and choices. The one making the *Spiritual Exercises* is challenged to follow Jesus into his passion and death because “what befell Jesus is bound up with every disciple’s own life and commitment to discipleship.”

I find the Contemplation on the Agony in the Garden especially helpful as I reflect on how multiple sclerosis

fects my discipleship. In this contemplation, Saint Ignatius calls us to enter into Jesus' pain. My doing so helps me to realize just how much Jesus loves me: He suffered hatred, rejection, fear and anxiety and eventual death for me. For me and for everyone. For our sins. What response are we to make?

I believe that part of my response to Jesus is to "let him in." Just as I walk with Jesus in his agony, Jesus wants to walk with me in mine. My partnership with Jesus is enhanced by the fact that Jesus and I have something in common: abandonment. I have not been abandoned by my disciples, but it sometimes feels as if I have been "abandoned" by my body. Painful. Just as Jesus moved beyond the pain and the feeling of isolation, so must I. The world is just waiting to love me. The world is just waiting for me to love back.

I exercise three or four times a week. I used to avoid certain weight machines because I thought that I required too much help to use them. Recently, I simply decided to ask for the help I need to use the machines that I want to use. So, I ask for help from employees, friends and even strangers who appear willing to help. After helping me a few times, one of these strangers said to me (after probably too many "thank you's" from me), "I hope you know how much helping you is a gift to me." Until that moment, I would have said that I had asked that man to help me simply because he was nearby and had a friendly face. I doubt now that it was that coincidental. I believe he was a messenger from God. I used to feel shy about making such statements, as if my faith were too sophisticated to allow for such simplicities; however, I now believe that God is always at work on my behalf. Sometimes, I am just too focused on myself to notice.

One of the contemplations on the Sixth Day of the Third Week is on the removal of Jesus from the Cross. Scripture tells us that he was let down by Joseph of Arimathea in the presence of the sorrowful mother Mary (Lk 15:46-47). I have many "Josephs" in my life — people who are there to help in my agony. Some of these people know how to help without being asked, while others need an invitation. The decision to extend the invitation is mine. Who knows how many more messengers from God are out there for me, just looking for an opportunity for discipleship?

FOURTH WEEK OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

In the Fourth Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the exercitant moves from a share in the Cross of Jesus to

My doing so helps me to realize just how much Jesus loves me: He suffered hatred, rejection, fear and anxiety and eventual death for me. For me and for everyone.

a share in the resurrection of Jesus. The grace peculiar to this week is "to rejoice and be glad intensely [because of the] great glory and joy of Christ our Lord." The Fourth Week's Contemplation to Gain (Divine) Love (*Spiritual Exercises* # 230-237), especially, allows me to reflect upon the type of commitment I am being called upon to make, in light of God's love for me and in light of my living with MS:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will. You have given all to me. To you, O Lord, I return it. All is yours, dispose of it wholly according to your will. Give me your love and your grace, for this is sufficient for me (Spiritual Exercises # 234).

I sometimes feel as if I have already given so much. God wants more. God knows that much of what I have given, I have not given freely. My good health, for example, is not something that I have given but is something that has been taken from me. Quite honestly, I want it back — most of the time, anyway. Even in my egocentricity — my belief that I know what is best for me — I can sometimes see beyond myself to see God's vision for me. I commit myself to looking for it more often. It is a vision where I not only endure my cross, but I embrace my cross, just as Jesus did.

The longer I live with MS, the more I realize that I cannot make the journey to "embracing" alone. I need God's help. I wish I could say, along with Saint Ignatius, that God's love and God's grace are "sufficient for me." I cannot; not yet, anyway. But I can say

I wish I could say, along with Saint Ignatius, that God's love and God's grace are "sufficient for me." I cannot; not yet, anyway. But I can say that I know that left on my own, God's vision for me will remain just that.

that I know that left on my own, God's vision for me will remain just that.

What accounts for my move away from independence? I believe that it has something to do with further reflection upon how the grace of God has been apparent in my life.

As I look back on my years of increasing disability and my need continually to begin using more sophisticated mobility aids, I notice something. At first, I think that I cannot handle it, but then, I begin to handle it. When I began to use a cane, I said, "No, God, not that." When I began to use forearm crutches, I said, "Enough, God, I can't do anymore." When I began to use a walker, I said, "God, this has really got to be the end." And when I began to use a wheelchair, I said, "Okay, God, the walker will do, but not a wheelchair." The pattern has always been initial reluctance, but then gradual acceptance. I was initially afraid I would look silly, but then I understood that I had to do what I must do in order to stay engaged in the world.

Some will call this bravery. I choose to call this the grace of God. God's grace has always helped me to adjust to the "next thing." Today — especially as I worry about how able I will be to continue to fulfill my ministerial obligations, or how able I will be to continue working out (even with help), or how much longer I will be able to drive the van that already has been converted for me — I believe that God is calling me to look at the past to see that with God's help, I have always managed. Why am I afraid that God might not be there for me in the future, both with regard to adjusting to disability and continuing to learn how to embrace my cross?

Saint Ignatius said, "You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it." I do not believe that God "gave" me MS. It is not God's way to punish me; it is not God's

way to discipline me. Even if God did not give me multiple sclerosis, I believe that I am being called to "return" it. It is in the returning — the acceptance, the detachment (as Saint Ignatius calls it), the dying to myself — that I am learning simply to trust that God knows what God is doing, even if I do not know what God is doing.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

I am a spiritual director at a Roman Catholic seminary. One of the important things I have learned is that directees sometimes simply need to know that they do not walk alone. When I was in training to be a counselor, we would have said the same thing about counselees; but in spiritual direction, obviously, God's companionship must also be considered.

The spiritual director cares as much as the counselor about a person's thoughts, feelings, experiences and relationships. The spiritual director, of course, cares even more about the ultimate dimension of it all, namely, "Where is God in all of this? What do you think God is calling you to?"

One of the things I have often done is help my directees to see that God calls to us just as we are — in our brokenness, our unworthiness and our sinfulness. We need to try to be better, but we also need to accept ourselves as we are because that is where we will hear God's call. Accepting ourselves as we are means coming to believe that our brokenness is not us; it is just a part of who we are.

In my experience, a seminarian's feeling of brokenness often comes from comparing himself with someone else, e.g., "I'm not as smart as he is, I'm not as talented as he, I don't pray as much as he." I believe that one of my strengths as a spiritual director is that I understand: I am tempted to compare myself with others, too. When I do, I often find myself lacking, especially these days when there is so much I cannot do.

As a person with disabilities, I sometimes grow tired of being reminded to focus on my abilities, not my disabilities. Deep down, though, I know that this must be my focus. I know that this must be the focus for all of us because it is God's focus. So, I understand my directees' temptation to compare themselves with others, but I also know that, ultimately, God calls all of us broken people simply to do the most with what we have been given.

CONCLUSION

I was in the physical therapy area of a hospital some years ago when I was still walking pretty well. When my therapist left for a moment, I sat down and could not help but overhear the conversation between another therapist and a patient. The patient was a woman about eighty years old. As they sat together to my left, the physical therapist suggested to the woman that she might consider beginning to use a cane. "Oh, no," the woman exclaimed, "I don't want to do that!"

When I heard the protest, I felt myself becoming resentful and a little bit arrogant. "Hmmpf," I thought, "How dare you get so upset about using a cane. Here I am (at the time) using a forearm crutch and a cane, and I'm less than half your age!" I wished I could be as feisty as she was, where my disability was simply the result of advanced years.

While I sat there becoming absorbed in self-pity because of the situation to my left, another situation presented itself to my right. There was a little boy, about four years old, about to pass by me as his therapist traveled behind him. The boy used two forearm crutches and was being held upright by the therapist's arms. From the way it looked, he could have been as resentful of me as I was of the woman next to me on the other side. Instead, the little boy was laughing, and seemed to be having the time of his life.

My "physical therapy story" is pretty simple. Reflecting now, though, on those brief moments between looking to my left and feeling resentful, and then looking to my right and feeling a little guilty, I think I gained insight into spirituality.

A general understanding of spirituality that I offer is that it is a matter of where we direct our attention: inward or outward. Those who direct their attention inward are focused on themselves and on having their needs met; those who direct their attention outward understand that life is about more than just themselves. They make room in their lives for other people and for God.

In living with multiple sclerosis, I must choose where I will direct my attention. When I choose to look outward, it is like looking to my left and feeling resent-

One of the important things I have learned is that directees sometimes simply need to know that they do not walk alone. When I was in training to be a counselor, we would have said the same thing about counselees; but in spiritual direction, obviously, God's companionship must also be considered.

ment and self-pity because life is more difficult for me than it is for others. When I choose to look outward, it is like looking to my right to see that I am not the only person who has challenges. Armed with this perspective, I will give help to others when I can and will receive help from others when I need it.

The desire to love and serve others comes from the Holy Spirit. The initiative is never our own. That's good news for me. Left on my own, I know that I might remain looking inside, looking to my left. I also know that I would miss many opportunities to proclaim the good news for all of us that truly, there is strength in weakness.

RECOMMENDED READING

Lonsdale, D. (1990). *Eyes to see, ears to hear: A Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. Chicago: Loyola, 1990.



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"Senior Moments" and *The Cloud of Unknowing*

Francis Dorff, O. Praem., S.T.D.



You walk into a room and stop dead in your tracks. Your mind is a total blank. You know you came there for something but you have absolutely no idea what it is. So you stand there in limbo, hoping nobody notices.

You are right in the middle of a sentence and a word you have known all your life fails to show up. It is not even on the tip of your tongue. It has just vanished into thin air, leaving a black hole of nothingness where it used to be. If only for a moment, you enter this black hole in disbelief and dread while your friends wonder where you went. While you are in this black hole, you feel as if you have forgotten much more than just a word. You feel as if you have forgotten everything. Gradually, these socially awkward pauses begin to punctuate your conversation.

If you are married when these moments of forgetfulness overtake you, you may have a certain advantage over those of us who are single. Your spouse may be able to help you. Your conversation then becomes a collaborative effort, with your spouse faithfully filling in the blanks.

"So we were on our way to...._____, and stopped at the...._____ hotel. You'll never guess whom we met._____. What a surprise to see her again!"

We now have a benevolent expression for these extremely awkward experiences. We call them "senior moments." That gives us a socially acceptable way of saying that, like it or not, this type of forgetfulness is part of becoming older. So get used to it.

The expression "senior moments" may be benevolent, but the experience of senior moments frequently feels otherwise. These moments of forgetfulness threaten our sense of control and our self-esteem. They publicize the fact that we do not "have it all together" and remind us that we are mortal. They introduce us to a vacuum at the center of our lives that can frighten us all the way to death.

Whether we let others know it or not, our initial reaction to these moments of forgetfulness is often anything but benevolent. We become frustrated, angry and upset with ourselves. This reaction makes it even more difficult for us to notice when the missing words eventually show up again and more difficult still for us to celebrate their gratuitous return. In their absence, some of us fill the vacuum they leave with choice one-syllable, four-letter words — at least under our breath. What can we do with a vacuum at the center of our life?

THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWNING

An anonymous fourteenth century spiritual director gives us an extremely benevolent answer to this question. In *The Cloud of Unknowing* he describes how, as mature Christians, we can lovingly enter the vacuum at the center of our lives and discover that it is the meeting place with a God who is beyond any of our personal thoughts, actions, feelings, memories, imaginings or contrivings. For the author of *The Cloud*, the way to that meeting place passes through what he calls "a cloud of forgetting." He devotes much of his book to describing carefully how we can cultivate this "cloud of forgetting" that distances us, if only for a moment, from all that we ordinarily know, do and can personally accomplish.

THE CONTEMPLATIVE WORK

It may never have occurred to us that cultivating the cloud of forgetfulness to which our senior moments introduce us can be a deeply spiritual work. For the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, however, it is clearly the primary work of a contemplative way of living.

These moments of forgetfulness threaten our sense of control and our self-esteem. They publicize the fact that we do not "have it all together" and remind us that we are mortal.

But I ask you: in what does this difficult task consist? Certainly it consists in treading down the remembrance of all the creatures that God has ever made and in holding them beneath the cloud of forgetting of which we have spoken before. All the difficult work is contained in this, for this is our fundamental struggle, with the help of grace. And the other mentioned above — that is to say, the stirring of love — that is the work only of God. Go on with your work, therefore, and surely I promise you that God shall not fail in God's work (XXVI: 3).

From this point of view, our "senior moments" may be very special moments of grace. They may be effortlessly taking us to a place that it might otherwise require years of dedicated centering prayer or contemplative meditative practice to enter. They may be God-given moments inviting us to forget, not just a word or two, but everything else, for the love of God.

BEING NOWHERE

If we object that our "senior moments" get us nowhere, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* wholeheartedly agrees with us.

"Where then," you say, "Shall I be? Nowhere, according to you!" Now truly you speak well; for that is exactly where I would have you be. The reason is that nowhere physically is everywhere spiritually....And who is it that calls this nothing? Surely it is our outer self and not our inner self. Our inner self calls it All, for it teaches our inner self to know the essence of all things, both physical and spiritual, with no special attention to any one thing by itself (LXVIII: 2-5).

Behind us is a cloud of forgetting that is between everything else and us. Before us is a cloud of unknowing that is between us and our God. And we are in the blind, dark, “nowhere” in-between.

The author gives us a graphic image for this experience of being “nowhere” doing “nothing.” He says that it is like being between two clouds. Behind us is a *cloud of forgetting* that is between everything else and us. Before us is a *cloud of unknowing* that is between us and our God (V: 1). And we are in the blind, dark, “nowhere” in-between.

This description takes us right back to the “black hole” of our “senior moments” and to the vacuum at the center of our lives — which is right where the author of *The Cloud* says God wants us to be. Why? So that God can get on with the creative work that only God can do, namely, the work of uniting us personally with God by creating “blind stirrings of love” within us that press on, and even pierce, the cloud of unknowing.

You are to strike that thick cloud of unknowing with a sharp dart of longing love; and you are not to retreat no matter what comes to pass (VI: 4).

These spontaneous stirrings of love come from a place that is completely beyond our control. They come from the dark, silent, creative, deeper-than-conscious, “nowhere” depths of our soul.

Pay attention to this work, therefore, and to its marvelous ways within your soul. When it has been truly conceived, it comes merely as a sudden stirring with no forewarning, instantly springing toward God as a spark from a coal. And it is wonderful to count the number of stirrings that may appear within one hour within a soul that is disposed to the work (IV: 14).

THE CRY OF THE SOUL

The author of *The Cloud* knows very well that being in this place of no place can be painful. That is not only

because, naturally, we like to know where we are and what is going on, but also because what goes on here makes us increasingly sensitive to how unworthy we are to be united to God in so intimate a way (XLIV). The author says nothing, however, about the four-letter outcries with which we sometimes punctuate our “senior moments.” We may safely assume that they are not conducive to the contemplative work that he is describing.

However, the author of *The Cloud* does describe a constructive alternative to cursing the vacuum at the center of our self. He describes how the silent stirring of love within us sometimes spontaneously give us simple, one-syllable words, such as “sin,” “love” or “God” that focus our spirit in this work and carry it forward a little prayers that “pierce heaven” (VII; XXXVII). He carefully notes that, while these and other examples may be helpful, the most helpful prayer words are always those that God spontaneously stirs up within us (XXXIX: 5). Spiritually, these one-word prayers are just as spontaneous, urgent and effective as our instinctive cries of “fire!” or “help!” when we are in dire need (XXXVII). These atom-like prayers are the elemental cries — the most basic expressions — of our soul.

LIVING SIMPLY

Even a casual reading of *The Cloud of Unknowing* makes it clear that if we dedicate ourselves to cultivating the spiritual potential of our senior moments our lives are going to be different. We will begin living with greater depth and simplicity.

For one thing, we will become more interested in what is going on within us rather than in what is going on around us (XVII). For many of us that itself will be a major conversion. It will feel as if we are retiring. In a most profound sense, we are.

For another thing, we will often be misunderstood by our friends, especially if they have never had a senior moment and are still very busy living the life of Martha. Experiencing such misunderstanding can be painful. When we think of it, though, why should we expect others to understand what we are experiencing when we do not understand it ourselves? Why should we expect them to understand that, like Mary in the Gospel, we are becoming fully engaged in lovingly being nobody, nowhere, doing nothing in the Presence of Our Lord? The detail in which the author of *The Cloud* treats this question (XVI-XXI) shows that he knows both the pain of being misunderstood on the

ore and the importance of remaining faithful to this
er work nevertheless.

Furthermore, our life will become God-centered in a
most intimate and dynamic way. We will find ourselves
ing more and more from the blind stirrings of love
at God gracefully creates in our soul. The author of
The Cloud repeatedly describes how this radically
anges our sense of what is really important in life
d greatly simplifies our prayer and our lifestyle. As
meditative work increasingly becomes “the one
ing necessary” for us, we gradually begin to eliminate
ot of unnecessary things.

In addition, these soulful stirrings lead us to live our
es with a simple wisdom that comes to us sponta-
neously from the inside out. The author of *The Cloud*
ures us that such wisdom makes us most attractive
others. It allows us to live in harmony with all sorts
people and helps us guide others to work with the
ne spirit of dedication with which we go about our
er work (LIV: 1-3).

“SENIOR MOMENTS”

In one sense, we have come a long way at this point
in our “senior moments.” In another sense, howev-

As this meditative work increasingly becomes
“the one thing necessary” for us, we gradually
begin to eliminate a lot of unnecessary things.

er, we have not come very far from them at all. The
author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* probably never
even heard of a “senior moment.” Yet, if we were to tell
him what it is like to have one, he would probably nod
knowingly...and smile.



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TEEN-AGERS IN DANGER

Teen deaths and disabilities are most often the result of behavior, not disease or other factors. Psychologists are trying to discover what
pushes teen-agers to abuse alcohol and other drugs and to engage in behaviors that are dangerous to themselves and to others.

A review of research studies published in the June 2003 *American Journal of Psychiatry* indicates that brain development in adolescence
may make youngsters more prone to addictions and to other risk-taking behavior. There are also indications that puberty is beginning at ear-
lier ages, which means the arousal of passions at a time when the cognitive skills to exert control over these passions is underdeveloped.

Three areas of concern for parents, teachers and others involved in the formation of teen-agers are drinking, smoking and bullying
because it has become clear from research that these behaviors, if begun early and left untreated, have life-long consequences. For
example, studies have shown that those who begin drinking alcohol before age fifteen are twice as likely to become addicted as those
who begin after age twenty-one. And excessive drinking is related to the major cause of death and disability among teen-agers, car acci-
dents, as well as to suicidal thoughts. The propensity to addiction also makes early smoking very dangerous for teen-agers because of
the serious effects on health of cigarette smoking. The issue in both drinking and smoking is how to keep teen-agers away from these
potentially dangerous substances.

Bullying as a teen-ager is another behavior that can have long-term consequences. Some research has shown that teen-age bullies
tend to end up being convicted for crime later in life. In all three cases, approaches that try to change norms for appropriate behavior
seem the most effective. (Reported in *Monitor on Psychology* February 2004, pp. 40-43.) Those interested in learning about solutions to
some of these potential problems among teen-agers will find a helpful website at www.ensuringsolutions.org produced by George
Washington University's Medical Center.

Attention to the Things of God: Principles for Nurturing Prayer

Joel Giallanza, C.S.C.



The great seventeenth-century French mystic and spiritual director, Saint Francis de Sales, described contemplation as “simply the mind’s loving, unmixed, permanent attention to the things of God” (*Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. 6, Chap. 3). We can easily understand loving attention as a description of contemplation, and even of other forms of prayer. However, our experience often stands in contrast to the other two qualifiers that Francis uses: unmixed and permanent. Not only contemplation but our prayer in general is often mixed with distractions, difficulties, daily concerns and other realities that draw our attention away from God or, at least, disrupt our focus on God. However brief or light those distractions may be, they call into question the possibility that our attentiveness to the things of God could ever be permanent. And yet, Saint Francis’ words are drawn from his own experience, as well as from the experiences of many others, affirming that such contemplative prayer is possible.

We strive to be sincere and serious about nurturing our relationship with God and our disciplines in the spiritual life. We do not set out to create the barriers or blocks, difficulties or distractions that we encounter along the pathways of our spiritual journey. We hope and would prefer that our relationship with God will be a smooth and steady progression; and yet, we do confront barriers and blocks, difficulties and distractions. How can we address them? How do we

structure our prayer in the midst of them?

In general, when speaking about a difficulty, we refer to a situation or an experience that we believe should be or could be other than it is. And closely related to that is the belief that what should be or could be is in some way better than the present situation or experience. When it comes to difficulties in our spiritual life and prayer, however, these beliefs are not always so clear. We may be confronted by a situation or an experience about which we are not certain what should be or could be. We are uncertain about what might be better, or even if the situation or experience can be better. When we take our personal context into account, it becomes even more complicated to find an insight or an approach that would address our particular experience. Whatever their form and content, difficulties in the spiritual life reflect the reality of the individual. They are not so generic that they can be conveniently compared and made equivalent to those that others may encounter. What is an intense difficulty for one person may be relatively simple to bear for another person, not a difficulty at all for another and possibly even a blessing for yet another. The interpretation of the situation and the experience is shaped by the person's past, personality, priorities, perspectives, preferences, pace and progress in the spiritual life.

I am not convinced it is possible to make a "grocery list" of difficulties that will be encountered in the spiritual life, other than in a general way. In fact, an initial response to the question, "Where do difficulties come from?" could be expressed in two words — almost anywhere. Every dimension of our life holds the potential to disrupt or delay our progress in nurturing our relationship with God: physical (sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell), relational (primarily, but not only, our most significant relationships), spiritual (concerns about faith, God, doctrine), internal (imagination, memory, intellect, will). Any specific list will reflect the spiritual journey of the individual experiencing the difficulty.

Rather than listing and analyzing difficulties, another approach will be presented here. If we can identify some basic principles that would assist us in addressing whatever difficulties we do encounter, then we can build a sound foundation upon which to determine some directions that could be taken in response to the difficulty. So, such principles can help us in discovering the roots of the difficulty. As we take up the challenge of making the adjustments that may be necessary, our continued

if we can identify some basic principles that would assist us in addressing whatever difficulties we do encounter, then we can build a sound foundation upon which to determine some directions that could be taken in response to the difficulty.

growth in the spiritual life will not be arbitrary. Whatever we try, whichever direction we take, will have a definite purpose, namely: strengthening our relationship with God, facilitating our journey and nurturing our prayer. We gradually learn that our contemplative attentiveness to the things of God truly can be, in the words of Saint Francis, "loving, unmixed, permanent."

JESUS' INSTRUCTIONS

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus teaches his disciples what we have come to identify as the "Lord's Prayer." It is among the first prayers that we learn by heart. Over the centuries, much has been said and written about this prayer by way of analysis, commentary and spiritual reflection. The prayer has become so familiar and second nature to us that we forget the context in which it first appeared. It is presented as part of Jesus' teaching on the Mount of the Beatitudes; its contents, then, are basic components for living fully the Christian life.

My reflections will focus on the preface to that prayer, for the text immediately preceding the Lord's Prayer is quite significant. Jesus gives to his disciples some precise instructions that are meant to shape their perspective on prayer, their approach to prayer and their practice of prayer.

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so they can be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to God who is in secret; and God who sees in secret will repay you. When you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do;

Jesus' instructions regarding prayer are quite straightforward, and we can interpret them on at least two levels.

for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your God knows what you need before you ask. (Matthew 6:5-8)

Jesus' instructions regarding prayer are quite straightforward, and we can interpret them on at least two levels. First is the practical level where Jesus indicates the basic postures and the perspectives necessary for effective prayer: privacy, intimacy, economy. Second is the philosophical or theological level of the principles implicit in those postures and perspectives. This second level will be the focus here. When these principles are not attended to, we lay the groundwork for difficulties in our spiritual life and our prayer.

Two brief points should be made before examining the principles. First, Jesus begins these instructions with an assumption — “when” you pray. He does not say “if” you pray. Jesus assumes that his followers will pray; thus, the basic practice for sustaining our prayer is fidelity. If we are not faithful to prayer, then we create difficulties that dull our sensitivities to God's presence and activity in our life. Any difficulties rooted in a lack of fidelity are our creation and our responsibility.

Second, fidelity involves a regularity in our relationship with the Lord; prayer must be incorporated into our daily life and schedule. It also involves an openness to whatever unfolds in our spiritual life so that resistance does not control our response when we enter unfamiliar territory. Resistance will disrupt the effectiveness of whatever efforts we make in the spiritual life precisely because those efforts would be half-hearted from their inception.

“DO NOT BE LIKE THE HYPOCRITES”

“Do not be like the hypocrites; they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so they can be seen by others.” Prayer is not performance. Prayer does not require an audience. We have to explore closely and expose honestly any tendencies

within ourselves that might enjoy having our spiritual practices noticed by others so that we are recognized and acknowledged as holy. Such tendencies are reflections of pride, which can have a debilitating and destructive impact on our progress in the spiritual life. Such pride is immediately rewarded, but not by God. We want to be noticed, and so we assure that we are noticed in some way. We have received our reward; we got what we wanted. God does not have to do anything because we were not truly focused on God in the first place. Our focus was the audience that would acknowledge and acclaim our spiritual practices. When unnoticed by others, practices rooted in pride and performance quickly become frustrating and tedious. Eventually, we decide that prayer consumes too much of our time and energy to be continued because it does not fulfill our needs.

The wisdom of the Christian spiritual tradition teaches us that we can be susceptible to such tendencies toward pride, especially as we become more proficient in the mental and the contemplative forms of prayer. Increasingly, people may want to talk to us about their spiritual life or ask for our assistance and guidance as support for their spiritual development. We can begin to think of ourselves in very messianic terms, though we may never explicitly articulate that thinking even to ourselves. We enjoy being noticed and being sought after for our spiritual insights. We may not perform our prayer as a public display in the same way as do those whom Jesus calls hypocrites in this text. Our approach may be much more subtle than that. Nevertheless, pride can generate a variety of difficulties that hinder our progress in the spiritual life, not the least of which is preoccupation with self and with the theatrical performance and precision of our prayer.

“GO INTO YOUR ROOM”

Prayer is interior. It cannot be summed up by the practices in our spiritual life; such practices, in themselves, do not automatically nurture prayerfulness. Prayer is a matter of the heart; prayerfulness unfolds deep within the self, for there is God's dwelling place. Of course there are external manifestations — sounds and words and gestures — that we utilize for our prayer; however, the integrity and the sincerity of those manifestations are determined by their rootedness deep within us, by their consistency with who we are as persons and by their truth based on the motives of our

part. If ever they become nothing more than publicists, then they cannot be named prayer.

The primary “room” that we must enter for prayer is self-knowledge. In coming to know ourselves, we come to know God. Precisely because we are created in God’s image and likeness, our efforts to know ourselves are closely related to and even inseparable from our efforts to know God. Searching for God exclusively outside ourselves will inevitably lead to frustration and disappointment. Even within the context of Christian community, we bring our unique selves to worship, to listen to God’s word and to search for God’s will. If we bypass the truth of our character as persons by creation and baptism — the truth that God is within us — then our search is in vain. Whatever we may discover will not be the God who fashioned us; whomever we may relate to will not be the God of Jesus. The gift of our creation in God’s image and likeness and the grace of our consecration in baptism affirm that the Incarnation continues to unfold within us as followers of Jesus. This is the room we must enter.

Self-knowledge is not a static accomplishment in our life. It must be nurtured so it evolves even as our life unfolds. As we mature and develop, so, too, must our self-understanding and our self-image. Self-knowledge is a dynamic and lifelong discipline intimately related to our growth in the spiritual life. That discipline engages us in a threefold process. First, we must acknowledge the truth of ourselves — strengths, weaknesses, aspirations, expectations, areas of resistance, potential for growth. Second, we must accept that truth without denying the reality and the impact of those aspects of our life that we do not appreciate or about which we are embarrassed. Third, we must act in response to what we have discovered. We do whatever we can to facilitate our continued growth as persons and to seek to strengthen their relationship with God. This action is essential to assure that our acknowledgment and acceptance of the truth we discover do not degenerate into a passivity that makes no effort toward growth. Self-knowledge is an indispensable discipline through which we encounter God who dwells with us, loves us and longs to be one with us.

SHUT THE DOOR”

These three words may be among the most challenging in developing and nurturing a life of prayer. The major portion of our effort can be expended, not so

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much in shutting the door, though that may require considerable discipline, as in keeping the door shut. Prayer is detached. Many realities will compete for entrance through the door, seeking to dominate our attention. Whatever the specific form and character of those realities, we often identify them as difficulties with which we must deal in our spiritual life. They are difficulties not so much by their content, but by their occupation of the space that we are striving to maintain, especially for our relationship with the Lord and our attentiveness to God. One example of this that I find mentioned regularly in spiritual direction is the challenge of dealing with distractions in prayer. Often they are described as a recurrent difficulty and a regular frustration that can make us sense that the time we dedicated to a particular prayer session has been wasted and that the prayer itself was ineffective. The content of the distraction is not always the primary difficulty that needs to be addressed. The root difficulty involves the time and the energy we expend in trying to overcome the distraction. Our efforts may serve only to keep our focus fixed on the distraction. Various exercises related to centering forms of prayer and the use of mantras can be very effective in teaching us to set aside a distraction gently and so refocus our attention on the Lord.

Shutting the door and keeping it shut require a discipline of detachment. Too often, detachment is misinterpreted as meaning devaluation of something. Detachment is not a statement about the lack of value in anything that we are shutting out. We are not detached because we negate the value of something; we are detached because we assign priority value to one thing and then, in light of that priority, assign an appropriate value to everything else in our life. For prayer we need sufficient space to be attentive to the Lord. The concerns related to our everyday tasks and responsibilities, which emerge during our prayer, are not valueless; in fact, they can be quite important for our well-being and that of those closest to us. It would be

imprudent to dismiss them summarily. But for the time of prayer, we shut the door; we set aside those concerns because of the priority we have placed on our relationship with the Lord during prayer. They are set aside for a time, not stripped of value. Such is detachment.

Detachment affords us the freedom, the space, for relating to the Lord through our discipline of prayer. Shutting the door of our heart and mind to external influences during prayer is not intended to be isolating or insulating. Rather, it is to focus our faculties on God and away from whatever could distract us from our relationship with God, from whatever could contradict and tarnish the goodness and the beauty of our creation in God's image and likeness. The nature and the extent of our daily tasks and responsibilities and concerns will have a determining influence on the intensity of the effort required to shut the door and to keep it shut. We must be deliberate, then, in determining the time of day for our prayer, the environment in which we pray and the style of prayer we use. That time and environment and style must reflect the reality of our daily life. The alternative is to build the discipline of our spiritual life on an image of ourselves or of prayerfulness or of relating to God that will be impossible to maintain, given our everyday responsibilities.

"PRAY TO GOD WHO IS IN SECRET"

Prayer is focused. We will discover God within us. However, the image of God that emerges in our prayer may be unfamiliar or unexpected or even uncomfortable for us. We may be tempted to turn our attention elsewhere because that image does not fit into the categories by which we prefer to think of God. We may encounter a God more personal and closer to us than we expected, a God who speaks the truth of ourselves to us rather than echoing the self-image we have constructed. If we allow our focus to drift from God, our prayer can settle into a comfort zone that will have little transformative impact upon us. The priority we assign to prayer gradually diminishes; even the value we assign to our relationship with God can lose its place in our life.

Praying to God requires focus. Maintaining that focus is work and requires generosity in both effort and energy. And, depending upon various personal factors — daily tasks, health, attitude, disposition, surroundings, relationships, expectations — maintaining focus can sometimes require a great deal of effort and energy.

Very often, maintaining our focus on God is nurtured through very simple exercises throughout our day. Calling to mind God's presence, reminding ourselves of God's love for us, turning to God in prayer, asking God for assistance and guidance, reiterating a phrase from the scriptures or a favorite prayer that is particularly important to us — none of these exercises take more than a few seconds, but they can be effective means for focusing on God.

This focus facilitates and nurtures our prayer "to God who is in secret." We can reflect on the "secrecy" in which we encounter God as having two dimensions. First, our prayer is intimate and personal. Jesus was not impressed with any modes of prayer built upon the priority of public display. God is to be found "in secret," apart from the crowd so to speak, precisely so we can fix our attention on the One to whom we are praying. In no way does this dimension diminish the importance of liturgical prayer, which, by nature, is public. The emphasis here is on our personal relationship with God and on the priority of encountering God within the intimacy of that relationship.

Second, this "secrecy" can also indicate the simplicity of our prayer. This dimension is closely related to the first. Just as we do not put on a performance for others in our prayer, so, too, there is no need to perform for ourselves. In the intimacy of our relationship with God, we bring ourselves, as we are, without pretense. The simplicity of our prayer has less to do with the specific prayer form we may be using and more to do with the clarity and the honesty that mark our relationship with God.

"GOD WHO SEES IN SECRET WILL REPAY YOU"

In prayer we do not encounter an impersonal oracle; we encounter the living God. Prayer is a relationship. It is interactive; we pray, and God responds. We cannot control what that response will be, and there is no assurance that we will even like the response; nevertheless, God will and does respond to us. There is a mutuality that is inseparable from the nature of prayer. Neither person in the relationship can be completely and always passive nor completely and always active and still maintain a healthy relationship. Reciprocity is necessary if this relationship is to be alive and sustain continued growth.

The ways and means, which become familiar as we develop and mature in our relationships with others, are essentially the same ways and means at work in our

relationship with God. It is, after all, an interpersonal relationship. God longs for our presence and responsiveness just as we long to have that from those we love, and they long for that presence and response from us. In the scriptures, we read of a jealous God when the people turn their attention elsewhere, of a forgiving and compassionate God when the people repent, of a God who dances for joy at the mere thought of the beloved people chosen to be God's own. We need only recall times when we have experienced jealousy, compassion and sheer joy to understand the type and depth of the relationship God desires to establish with us.

We come to know and love God in much the same way that we come to know and love others. That knowledge and that love engage us in a mutual vulnerability and intimacy. And just as we might back away from a relationship because of an uncertainty about its place in our life or an unwillingness to be vulnerable and intimate, so, too, we can back away from a relationship with God. The mutuality necessary for this relationship can frighten us because we are uncomfortable feeling exposed and transparent even before God. We resist and retreat; then prayer becomes an impersonal exercise with little affective impact on our life. Precisely because prayer is a relationship, it is also a decision. We must decide if we want to be in this relationship and if we want to make the necessary effort to nurture it. Such a decision must be made by the heart. "God works in secret" and will respond to our efforts and repay us; God will see if those efforts are truly from the heart.

DO NOT HEAP UP EMPTY PHRASES"

"Do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them...." Prayer is not quantitative. Among the greatest temptations in any form of prayer is to assume that more is unquestionably better. This can be in reference to words or time or gestures or whatever other components we incorporate into our discipline of prayer. The determination of what is better cannot be merely a quantitative measurement. The quality of our practices in prayer depends upon the intricacies of our relationship with the Lord and on our particular focus in prayer. The character and quality of that relationship will be the principal determinants of the direction to be taken for continued progress in our spiritual life.

Many difficulties emerge from the quantitative

In the intimacy of our relationship with God, we bring ourselves, as we are, without pretense.

approach to prayer. Such an approach can generate expectations that are disconnected from our everyday life, disruptive of our relationship with God and debilitating for our progress in the spiritual life. What we do in our prayer and the time involved in doing it must reflect our focus on God, our love for God, the priority we have given to our relationship with God and the truth of our personal, everyday life. Whatever we do in our spiritual life must be rooted in meaning, not in a mathematical formula.

The quantitative perspective on prayer reflects our natural desire to know something about our progress in the spiritual life. We want some gauge of how we are doing, some indication that we are heading in the right direction, some affirmation that our spiritual life is healthy and progressing. The quantitative perspective assumes that such a gauge and indication and affirmation will be tangible and measurable, calculated and certified by using a convenient formula. The inaccuracy of this perspective lies in the fact that quantitative measurements are not easily adaptable to the many variables within relationships. The only truly valuable gauge or indication or affirmation will come from deep within our heart, from our desire to love the Lord and our longing to be one with the Lord.

"GOD KNOWS WHAT YOU NEED BEFORE YOU ASK"

Prayer is personal. The truth that God knows our needs rests firmly on the fact that we are created in God's image and likeness. By our very creation we are capable of a relationship with God that is personal and intimate. Prayer is meant to be and will be such a relationship to the degree that we allow God to enter deeply into the reality of our life. What are the characteristics of such a relationship? What qualities of life reflect our conviction that God knows our needs even before we ask? First and foremost is faith itself. We must believe that we are created in God's image and likeness, that God does communicate with us and that God respects who we are as persons. That faith stands

In his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul writes:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the holy ones according to the will of God. (8:26-27)

A fundamental disposition for nurturing our continued growth in prayer and the spiritual life is humility. Paul does not say that we do not know how to pray, but that we do not know how to pray as required to be completely aware of and responsive to God's will. In effect, Paul is saying that we do not know how to pray from the heart. Further, Saint Paul does not say that the Spirit will pray for us; rather, he teaches that the Spirit will intercede for us. We bear the responsibility to pray, but the Spirit will assist and accompany us by praying from deep within our heart, from that space where words become more a limitation than an elaboration. From that space, the Spirit intercedes for us "according to the will of God." Such is the goal of all prayer: to bring us into union with God's will in all things, in every dimension of our life.

Through humility we allow the Spirit to assist us in our weakness, to intercede for us. In humility we will recognize and embrace that prayer is beyond performance, that it is interior, detached and focused. It engages us in a relationship that cannot be quantified precisely because it is personal. In that recognition and embrace we will understand the truth and the wisdom of Saint Francis de Sales' statement that "Contemplation is simply the mind's loving, unmixed, permanent attention to the things of God" (*Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. 6, Chap. 3). And even more, we will know that such attentiveness is indeed possible.



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as the very foundation of the spiritual life, and it marks our prayer as a truly personal encounter with God who loves us and who will not abandon us. Apart from that faith prayer can become quite impersonal, degenerating into a performance having neither substance nor passion. With faith, our prayer becomes increasingly personal as we continue to probe the beauty of our creation and the extent of God's goodness to us.

Second, accepting the truth that God knows our needs requires a trust that God will respond to those needs in ways that are for our good. We may not always understand and experience God's presence and activity in our life as moving in that direction; indeed, there may be times when we are not at all clear about the nature of God's work in our life. Trust is imperative. Such trust is convinced of God's integrity and fidelity, God's love and compassion. In trust we bring ourselves before God as we are; we pray without pretense or deception. With trust our prayer reflects who we are as persons and invites God into our life as it is.

Third, if we trust that God knows our needs, then we must cooperate with the work that God is doing in our life. We must desire to do God's will. This is an essential component of the transformation that must take place within us — God's will must become our own. If we believe and trust that God's work is truly unfolding with us, even though we may not see it as such, then we must choose to facilitate that work to the best of our ability. God does know our needs. The challenge ever before us is to determine the extent to which we believe and trust that and so choose to cooperate with it.

Emily

Reg Cessna, H.M.



On Friday a friend told me that she hadn't taken time to grieve. "I've been too busy," she said, "and I know that I need to make time."

I spent the next forty-eight hours waking and sleeping, trying to figure out what that meant. Taking the time to grieve. Grief is no stranger to me. It is real. Sickness. Death. Loss. All at once, it seems. I finish a good book and want to call my mother to see if she wants to read it. We have always shared good books. But her dementia is so advanced that she sometimes doesn't even know who I am. I hear a certain strain of music, and I think of my musician mother, dead last year at too early an age. A good friend died last year, and I still have her phone number on my speed dial.

My grief is close. Always with me. Have I taken the time to grieve? How does one do that? Especially when grief is always present. Knowing that it will not always be as intense. But always present. Coloring all days and nights. I have to give myself time to grieve. But what other time is there besides every minute of the day and night?

She was dressed in a pink velour jacket. Light brown hair fell below her collar. She was in the pew ahead of me. This beautiful child became my focus during Mass, and she, herself, was my prayer

as I joined her in marveling at color transforming paper. She was coloring a cowboy. A cowboy playing a guitar. It filled her moment and mine, as well. The moment was all we had as one blended into another interrupted only by music from the choir.

Yahweh, I know you are near, standing always by my side. You guard me from the foe, and you lead me in ways everlasting.

Her innocence was so pure that it was piercing. My grief was momentarily suspended somewhere beyond her face.

She sat on the kneeler, the pew her desk. Her crayons were lined up in an orderly, executive manner. I was fascinated by her color selection. The choices of blue, purple and pink were striking.

Out of the corner of my ear I heard "faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love." And I thought of the joy, peace and innocence I was experiencing in her as I watched.

Joy, peace, innocence — and grief. And the deepest of these is grief. Joy, peace and innocence will come and go. Grief you will always have with you. But this child does not yet know this.

Blessed are they, full of sorrow, they shall be consoled. Rejoice and be glad! Blessed are you, holy are you! Rejoice and be glad, yours is the kingdom of God.

She stood on her desk chair and faced the altar when the bells rang to announce the bread of life and the cup of salvation. The bells ended, so she sat again and finished coloring the man with the guitar. She carefully tore the sheet from her coloring book and put it in the pew by her father.

Awake from your slumber! Arise from your sleep. A new day is dawning for all those who weep. Let us build the city of God May our tears be turned into dancing!

After Mass, I introduced myself to her father. "Her name is Emily," he said, "and she is four years old." I asked Emily if I could have her picture to hang on my refrigerator. When she looked at her father with a big

question on her face, he said, "I know you did it for me but you can give it to Peg."

"No, no, no," I said. "That would not be okay." I told Emily that I was glad she had done the picture for her father and that I enjoyed seeing it. I turned to put my coat on, and when I looked back, Emily was handing me a new picture that she had quickly done with just a few strokes of red. Overwhelmed by the generosity of this little person, I thanked her and told her that red was my favorite color and that I would put it on my refrigerator. Which I did. And it serves to remind me that there is more to life than grief. There is joy, peace and innocence, as well.

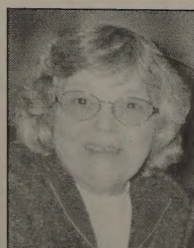
I came to realize in those moments on a Sunday morning that the question is not about taking time to grieve. The question, for me, is how to take time out of grieving to appreciate the beauty, peace and rhythm of life. In this instance, it was found in the form of a kind-hearted little girl. Emily is her name, and she turned my tears into dancing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

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Schutte, D. "You Are Near." Text based on Ps 139. Text and music ©1971, Daniel Schutte. Published by OCP Publications.

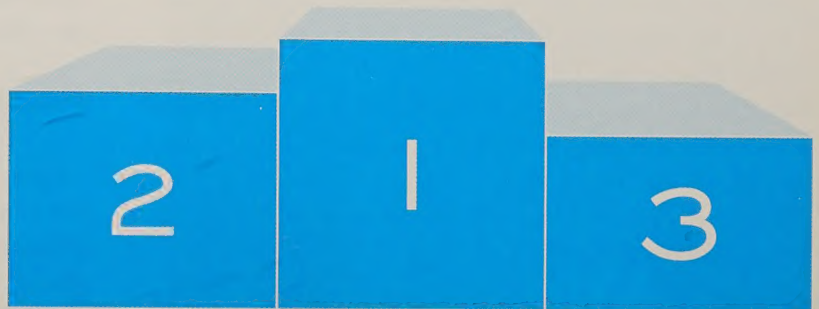
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Sister Peg Cessna, H.M., is a sister of the Humility of Mary; she was a high school teacher for twenty-five years, founder of Heartbeats, which she served as its Executive Director.

Should Leaders Show FAVORITISM?

Anonymous



In my role as a congregational leader, I was recently faced with the task of asking a member to vacate a ministry position he had held for many years. It was only after some weeks of dialogue during which there was an exchange of letters and a number of meetings that the person agreed to resign from the position and accept another less demanding role elsewhere. Throughout the process I was firm but also as pastoral as I could be toward the member.

It was with some relief that I finally received his letter of resignation from the position and his acceptance of a new role. It was a moment of minor celebration. However my joy was quickly dampened by another member who accused me of showing favoritism to this member. He felt I should have simply removed him from the position and not worked so diligently to guide him to a voluntary resignation. He also felt that I was over-generous in offering him another position. This disgruntled member then called to mind a situation involving another member a year or so previously in which he believed I had been too generous. He felt I was favoring some members over others, notably him, though of course he did not mention himself explicitly.

A case can be made that this disgruntled member has been treated very well over the years. Somehow we often forget the blessings we have received. But that is another story. I must confess that at the

time I was stung by his criticism. It touched a nerve in me that I felt I needed to investigate. Could there be some truth in what he was saying?

THE PRODIGAL FATHER

Reflecting on this incident my thoughts immediately went to the words uttered by the father of the prodigal son in Luke's Gospel. To the disgruntled older son, unhappy at the father's abundant generosity to the prodigal, the father says, "My son you are with me always and all I have is yours. But we had to celebrate because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life, he was lost and has been found." (Luke 15:32) That is the only reply I can give to the disgruntled confrere: "You are with me always and all I have is yours. But this brother of ours was dying and needed some help to find life; he had lost his way and needed to be helped to find it once again."

I know this is true but I sensed there was something more to investigate.

FAVORING THOSE WE FEAR

Reflecting on the two people I was accused of favoring, I came to see that they were the two people in my community of whom I am most afraid. More than any other members they are the ones who have the potential to get under my skin and break me as leader. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, consciously or subconsciously, they know how to push my buttons and engage me in a psychological warfare that could undo me. I am aware of this and strive, perhaps too much, to keep them on my side.

I recall earlier this year when one of them engaged in a bitter battle to get what he wanted. There were phone calls at all hours, late at night, early in the morning, on weekends, etc. I was never safe from another phone call, which would often be abusive and accusatory. Hanging up from one such phone call early one morning, I found myself shaking quite violently in a powerful adrenalin rush. In that moment I realized that the issue was no longer the well-being of this member who was actually looking after himself quite well. The issue was my well-being, which was important both for me and for my community. For I believe

that when the leader "holds," the community "holds." I made a decision to "cut" this member from contact with me for a period. Eventually, we resumed a cautious communication, but I have kept him at a safe distance since and have made a few generous concessions to keep him happy. I have done so for my well-being as much as for his.

So, I must admit, I have been guilty of favoring out of fear. There is truth in the criticism. But I believe I can also say to every member entrusted to my guardianship: "You are with me always and all I have is yours." But do I show this in my actions? Are my brothers aware of this? Can I be bold enough to suggest that perhaps the father of the prodigal son took the ongoing presence of the elder son a little too much for granted?

A WARNING — GIVE TIME TO ALL

Like many leaders I can fall into the trap of giving too much of my time and my physical and emotional resources to too few of the members. When a leader is giving eighty percent of himself or herself to twenty percent of the membership something is amiss, with potentially serious consequences. First, a good number of the twenty per cent who are perpetually unhappy actually enjoy being unhappy. By trying to help them resolve their difficulties and thus remove the source of their unhappiness, you can in fact be making them more unhappy. They will be most at peace if you don't disturb their unhappiness too much. (Sorry for the cynicism, but I have been in leadership for a long time.)

More serious, however, can be the neglect of those confreres who simply go about their work day after day year after year, with little noise and complaint, those trusty souls on whom you can always call when a difficult task needs to be done. Unchecked, they can be slowly burning out, perhaps becoming steadily more discouraged with the passing of the years. It is very important for me to go out of my way to talk with such members, to see how they are and to give them opportunities for renewal and personal development, even to insist on it. It may be difficult to survive for a year when they are away on renewal, but I know the long-term welfare of the community is dependent on such acts.

In the final analysis, these are the people I need to favor regardless of any criticism my actions may attract.